



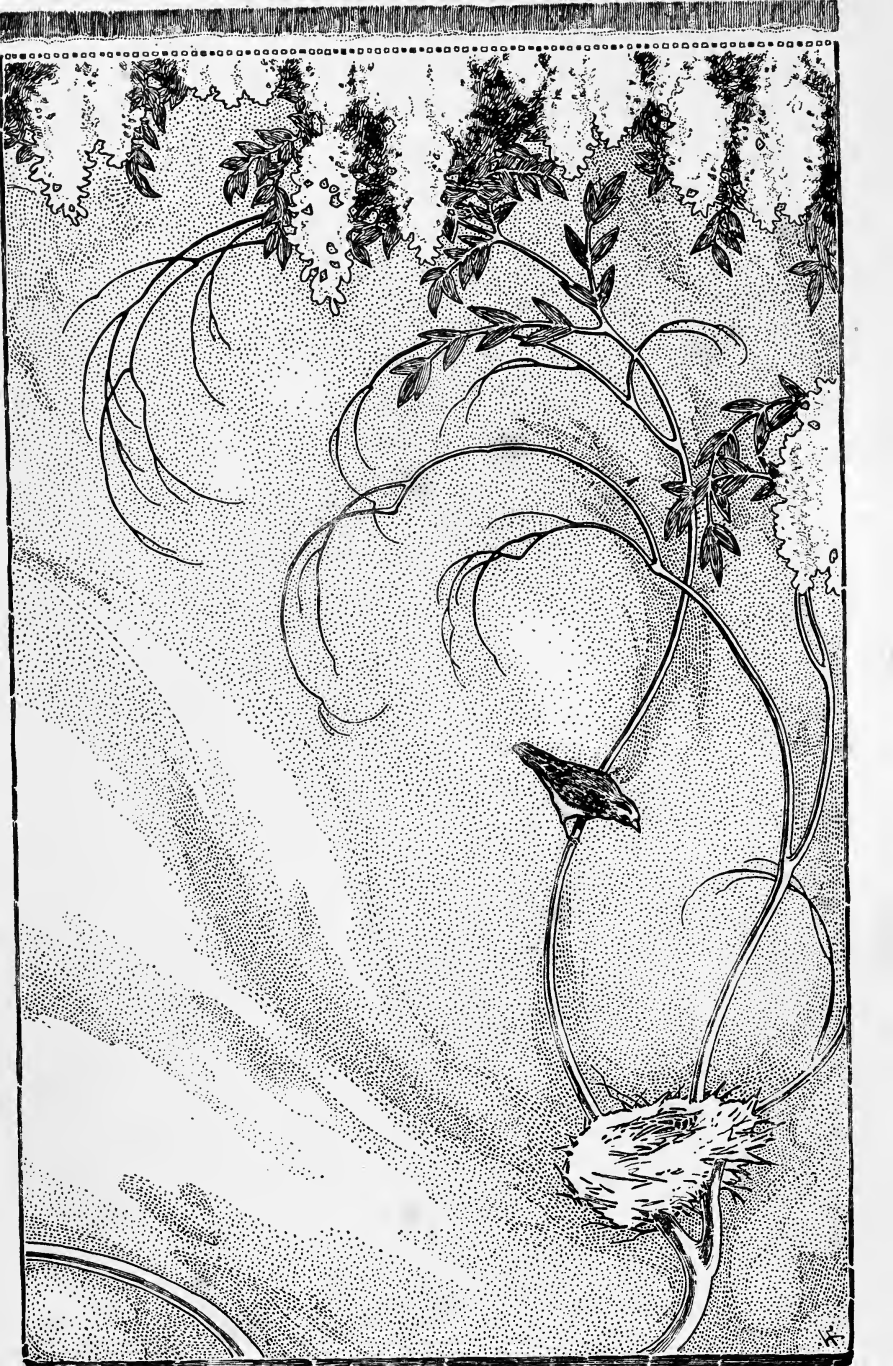
J. P. MOWBRAY



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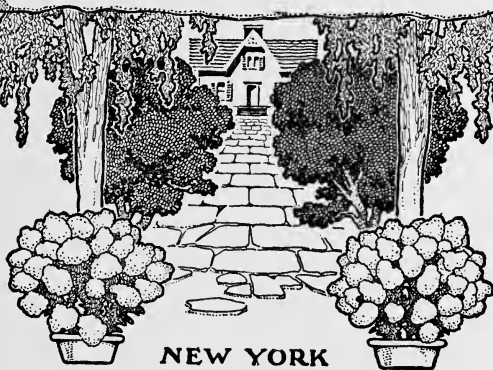




THE MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

BY

J. P. MOWBRAY



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PREFACE

THE story told in this book claims only to be the record of an ordinary man's experience and success in his efforts to make a home for himself in the country.

It was believed by the writer that it would be a merit to keep the narrative as close as possible to actual facts, and not avail himself of any more romance than usually falls to the lot of an ordinary and thrifty man, who perhaps is often a good deal of a hero, though he is himself hardly aware of it, and is not usually celebrated in literature.

If there are any small recompenses in this humble hero's endeavours growing out of the everyday facts of life, and his task is lit by some homely but enduring gleams, the book may encourage and stimulate other ordinary men who have the capacity to long for a home. Such is the hope as well as the purpose of the author.





CHAPTER I

	Page
Castles in the Air	I

CHAPTER II

The Search	33
----------------------	----

CHAPTER III

The Householder	56
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV

On Her Own Threshold	79
--------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V

The Incipient Garden	100
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VI

The Day of Small Things	121
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VII

In Which John Entertains Angels Unawares	142
--	-----

CONTENTS

CHAPTER VIII

	Page
In Which the Tempter Enters	163

CHAPTER IX

The Raising of the Roof	183
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER X

Recompense	204
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI

Winter's Warnings and Discomforts	222
---	-----

CHAPTER XII

Conclusion	243
----------------------	-----





The Making of a Country Home

CHAPTER I

CASTLES IN THE AIR

MR. JOHN DENNISON lived in the large flat house, The Marmontelle, on Fifty-eighth Street. He had lived there two years; that is, ever since he had married the girl of his choice, who was then Lucy Raymond. He was superintendent in the large wholesale establishment of Clayton & Deems, very far down town, and he was accepted in his own small circle of friends as a well-fixed and promising young man, capable of supporting a genteel establishment; who dressed his wife well, and entertained his friends with comfortable if not

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

elegant hospitality. In other words, John Dennison was one of several thousand young men in the great city who earn a salary of two thousand four hundred a year, by the exercise of routine fidelity, and manage to enjoy life as they go along. Most of his friends were men of the same status, who had given up many of their early ambitions and had adjusted themselves easily to that kind of commercial life in which there is little more than an assured competence or a comfortable drudgery.

But John Dennison at the end of two years had grown slightly restless in his mind at the prospect. If the truth could be known, this restlessness probably sprang from the cradle wherein his first-born was very daintily tucked up in laces. John possessed something of an imaginative mind, which, of all things in the world, is the most superfluous and distressing endowment for the superintendent of a large importing house. He probably inherited from his New England father what we call a constructive talent. He was always fashioning things just a little ahead of the prosaic duties that ought to have satisfied him when he became the possessor of a wife and baby.

He was within a year of being thirty, and twenty years more of getting on the car at seven in the morning and climbing back at five in the evening, going to the same cosey room, kissing his wife and baby in the same way, paying the same three-fourths of his salary to the landlord, the grocer, and the tailor, and nursing a contented

CASTLES IN THE AIR

mind by going to the Central Park on Sunday morning and the theatre on Wednesday night — this prospect, he was beginning to feel sure, would become intolerable in twenty years more. But there was no escape from it. He had fixed his lot, and he must take things as they came, and, if possible, manage to squeeze out enough to keep up appearances and his life insurance — in case he should make a misstep some night in jumping for an electric car.

Oddly enough John Dennison did not have the comfortable mental equipment that settles down passively under these conditions. He was more and more convinced, as he thought about it, that he was not getting all that a faithful drudge is entitled to in this life. He was not only not storing up any power, but the joys that he was seizing on the way were beginning to leave an unpleasant taste in his mouth. He had thought this over for several months ; figured it this way and that in his own mind, without saying anything to his wife, but at last he arrived at something like a conclusion. He came home one night in the early spring, looking a little more tired than usual, and his wife met him in the hallway when he got off the elevator. She began at once : —

“My dear, Kate Ellis came over this afternoon and insisted that we should join her and Wesley at dinner. They have found a new restaurant. I’ve forgotten where it is, but it is in some out-of-the-way place, and is all the go.”

Her husband pushed the hair off her forehead

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

and kissed her. "You did not promise them, I hope."

"No — not positively. I told her not to wait for us; perhaps you would not feel like going out."

"Thanks. I don't. I'd rather spend the evening with you. I detest all restaurants, and new ones especially. The perfidiousness of the food is regulated by the popularity of the place."

She looked pleased. "Do you feel economical or tired, dear?"

"Both."

"Then we'll eat our own dinner. Only one course, and that is restful. I was afraid you'd say yes, and I'd have to dress."

They went into the rooms, and John, with careless haste, made his way direct to a cradle, and pulling away the coverlet, began rubbing his mustache over something pink and warm, which responded with a cry.

"Now I hope you're satisfied," said his wife. "You had to wake him up, and I've been the last half-hour getting him to sleep."

"The idea of your packing him out of sight just as I arrive!"

Whereupon he dug out the pink bundle and went up and down the room, playing a risky game of pitch-and-toss with it, and, it being a remarkably good-natured bundle, quickly adapted itself to the loss of its nap, and after one or two rolls of the lip and watery stare of blue eyes, was tied in

CASTLES IN THE AIR

a baby's chair at the table, where it could clutch at the sugar bowl impotently, and John, slippered and smoking-jacketed, sat down to his dinner in their little dining room.

"What are those?" he asked immediately, pointing with his fork to a dish in the middle of the table. "They look like birds. You don't call that economy?"

"You shall find out for yourself. I felt extravagant and wanted to surprise you."

He fell to eating with a good zest, for he was young and hearty, but his incidental attention to the baby, who had to throw the napkin-rings and spoons on the floor, *seriatim*, and needed a constant supply, occupied so much of his time, that his wife waited in vain for the expected burst of delight over her dish, and instead of drinking the cup of tea she had poured out, and which was steaming in front of her — for this little meal was a humble compromise of the city dinner and the country tea — she sat watching her husband, having already detected something unusual in his mood.

She was probably twenty-six years old; that is, about three years younger than John. She was that kind of girl who makes the discovery that she is pretty to only one man in the world, the rest of the world being content to take his estimate of her to avoid argument; but at odd times it must have been momentarily apparent to the rest of the world that John had the clearer vision, for she had that curious quality of flaring

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

up suddenly into decided attractiveness, whereupon some of her most intimate female friends would remark, with a little display of that fine consideration for their own sex which they keep in reserve, "Lucy isn't such a bad-looking girl, after all," and this always gave occasion to one or two domestic cynics of the other sex to fire off their reserve shot, and remark with all the subtle irony of convenient commonplace, "Ah, madame, handsome is as handsome does. Mrs. Dennison is a pearl." It being, as Mrs. Johnson observed, a domestic cynic's notion that the ideal woman is secreted in the dark, according to the law of oysterdom.

Mrs. Dennison's photographs lacked many of the seductive qualities that make men tack them up at the head of their beds and keep them in anonymous albums. According to St. Gaudens her mouth was too large, and her nose had none of the rectitude of a Greek profile. At first sight, and unadorned, you set her down as one of those divine soubrettes in life's drama who are apt to make things merry. As her husband had once remarked with an entirely new admiration, she was evidently made for business. But it was noticeable that those who knew her best grew to like her large mouth. It was what her uncle, the dominie, had called the "*Os magna soniturum*," and then mis-translated, as the mouth made for great laughs. As for her slightly snub nose, well, somehow that seemed, on a better acquaintance, to be a thoroughly human affair that was always trying to

CASTLES IN THE AIR

imitate, in its static way, the inimitable sauciness and cock of her head.

"Well," she said, "why don't you say something about my rare dish?"

Thus called to a proper sense of his duty, John broke out heedlessly. "Why, it's simply stunning. What the deuce is it, anyway? You got it at the French cook-shop, of course?"

"No, I didn't. I bought it at the pork-butcher's. It cost me thirty-five cents. It's common pork tenderloin. But I stuffed it with chopped green pepper and mushrooms and a bit of celery, and baked and basted it till my face was as red as a beet, and I don't believe you would have said a word if I hadn't prompted you."

John had that ordinary and vital sense of humour which is apt to take the direction of exaggeration. He lay back in his chair and pretended to be half paralyzed.

"Pork tenderloins!" he exclaimed. "Well, you are a Banshee. Do you know, I believe you could make tripe ambrosial, and set cabbage on a pinnacle if you gave your mind to it. Have you got any more? I feel like Cæsar. The appetite which you have created grows upon that which feeds it."

"No more. You have eaten the whole of it. There were only two."

"Except what you ate yourself. I gave you one."

"And I put it back while you were playing with the baby — cannibal."

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

He became suddenly serious. "Lucy," said he, after a pause, "do you know, your possibilities scare me sometimes, I'm such a humdrum brute, and getting more so every day."

"But please don't let the baby throw that tea-cup on the floor and smash it. My mother gave me that set, and I can't replace it."

He moved the tea-cup away mechanically, but he was thinking of something else.

"You were worried when you came in," said his wife. "What is it?"

"You," he answered, as he got up and began poking about on the mantel for his cigar.

"Oh, come, don't jolly me. Out with it. What has happened?"

"You don't mind if I smoke in here?"

"No, dear, but the baby, remember ——"

He laid the cigar down submissively, and coming back to his chair, said, with some little apparent effort, "Lucy, does it ever occur to you when you get tired that we made a mistake in getting married?"

She could not hide a look of astonishment, but she did not answer directly. She stared and said, "Well?"

"Don't misunderstand me. I should have said *I* made a mistake."

"Oh—h!" from the little woman's mouth, a curiously elongated and indefinite monosyllable; and then her husband might have seen, if he had been in an observant mood, what a fine agreement there was between her nose and the set of her

CASTLES IN THE AIR

head, together reminding one of a hair-trigger that only needs one more touch to go off.

"Yes," he went on, "I am older than you, and ought to have caught the lesson of life, which is plainly written for such fellows as I am — before taking the fatal leap. It's the commonest kind of smartness for a man who has a race to run, to win his goal before he handicaps himself — with a wife and a baby."

"And what put this belated rubbish into your head, my dear?" asked Lucy.

"You," he said. "Two years and a half ago, when I put the bonds upon you, you were brimful of a girl's rosiest dreams. I caught all my sense of the beautiful in God's world from you. You sang and painted and danced and dreamed, and I took you out of your throbbing exultant life, and shut you up in this canal-boat, where there is no present chance of escape. A man ought to be hanged for less."

This time she said "Oh!" with an altogether different intonation, as if she felt relieved, and he plunged ahead.

"Do you remember that day you came home from Holyoke? I can tell you exactly how you were dressed, my dear, from your saucy leghorn hat to your stout little boots, and that alligator belt with a bunch of Marguerites stuck in it. You thought there wasn't anything good enough for you in this world. And you were right. You came fresh out of the pure air and brought some of it with you. Do you remember, my

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

dear, my sentimental verses in which I called you 'rainy-sweet and blossom-glad'?"

His wife was listening, and there was a little water in her eyes. He was brute enough to remind her of what she no longer was. Woman-like, she was saying to herself with the rapidity of lightning, "I must be red with standing over the stove. I am not as fresh as I once was. It must be a disappointment to a man." What she managed to say to him was:—

"I know, I know, John. I am no longer a schoolgirl with Marguerites. I wish I might be for your sake."

He stared at her with surprise, and seeing the water in her eyes which she was vainly endeavouring to hide, something of his blunt cruelty occurred to him, and getting up so suddenly that he upset the chair and frightened the baby, who began to cry, he came and put his arm tenderly around his wife's neck.

"Little woman," he said, "your feelings have gone off in the wrong direction, I swear it. I didn't remind you of that happy day when we came from Holyoke because you have lost anything, but because you have grown so much more beautiful and sacred as a wife and mother than such a brute as I could hope for; and I am beginning to feel like the thief who stole the fire from heaven and was then chained to a rock for it. There was such a scoundrel in mythology, wasn't there?"

She wiped her eyes. "Take your cigar and

CASTLES IN THE AIR

go in the sitting room, dear. You have frightened the baby. I will come there in a few moments."

He shut the sitting room door and walked up and down while he smoked. He was now in that mood when trifles make a new appeal to the sense. He looked at Lucy's plants in the little bay, and thought how she had watched and coaxed them along, and how they withered in the gas, in spite of her. There was the prickly pear that Colonel Wallace had brought her from Arizona, and she had watered it to death, killing it with too much kindness, so that it was now yellow and shrivelled. He stood a moment in front of the little picture that she had painted in the Berkshire Hills. It was very crude and raw, but he had put a ten-dollar frame on it, and was ready to kill any man who said it was not equal to a Corot. There was her neglected easel in the corner, with her old leghorn hat hanging on a peg of it, which gave a reckless artistic flourish to the room. She caught him looking at it when she came softly in and shut the door.

"Don't talk too loudly," she said, "or you will wake Harold."

"I've been thinking about our affairs for some days," he began, "and I get restless and discouraged at times."

"If anything has happened," she said, "you ought to tell me just what it is."

"Nothing has happened, I assure you — nothing is likely to happen. It is the leaden un-

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

likeliness that weighs on me. Some of the unemployed faculties have not yet grown numb with the dead pressure of this life."

There was a coal fire in the grate. She gave it one or two pokes as if to gain time and make up her mind how to meet this mood. Then she sat down in a low rocker, looking very receptive and passive in her plain but becoming wrapper, and gazed meditatively and expectantly into the fire. All she said was: "You would have felt better, John, if we had gone out to dinner. You need a change."

"I'm very glad I did not go," said John. "I'd rather talk to you than listen to Wesley and his wife the whole evening. I see the papers are beginning to advertise the Easter goods."

"Did you notice that? It's not like you."

"Oh, it reminded me of an Easter only two years ago. I noticed this morning while I was dressing that the sun had got round on the wall to your picture. I can tell when Easter's near, by that, without looking in the papers."

"But what makes you give it that melancholy turn? Something has happened, John, and you are beating about the bush."

"No — nothing happens, that's the curse of it — except ——"

"What?"

"That I shall get to be a disappointed drudge and you a domestic slave, accommodating ourselves, without a kick, to the dull inevitable,

CASTLES IN THE AIR

with all the sunshine and song squeezed out of us. I think a man feels this as a premonition more keenly when Easter approaches. That's what I meant, my dear, by saying that a man ought to reach his goal before he takes a wife, for the more he loves her the more of a handicap she is. Don't you see that?"

"No. I don't see it at all."

"But you understand that he will not take any risk when he is married; would rather plod securely than conquer at his peril. I ought to have made a home fit for such a wife as I have before I married her."

Then she laughed one of her copious, mellow laughs. "I think you have got that wrong, John, upon my word I do. Homes do not produce wives or lead up to them. It's just the other way, it seems to me. The wives produce the homes. Young men, as I understand it, think just about as much of making a home before they get a wife, as they think about making a flying trip to the moon. Why, it would be just too ridiculous, John, to see a young man building a home and furnishing it, and then expecting a wife and baby to drop in because it's ready, as the wrens do. You know yourself you never would have had a home like this if you hadn't got married. How could you?"

"Do you call this a home?"

"Well, I suppose I have entertained some such idea when you were in a good humour. What do you call it?"

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"A stopping-place. Have you really let your mind settle down comfortably to this canal-boat?"

"I suppose I have. My mind is of that order which is said to be a continual feast. Perhaps by a liberal construction it may mean a mind given to the providing of continual feasts over a hot stove."

He passed this sly allusion over and went on with his own theme.

"It isn't the kind of home, Lucy, that my girl from Holyoke saw in her dreams and tried to paint, and that I ought to have made possible for her—a world of her own, of sunshine and freedom and flowers and abiding security."

"But, John, you couldn't possibly realize a world by yourself. You were only a hemisphere."

He stopped walking and looked at her inquiringly. The idea of his being a hemisphere had certainly never occurred to him before. To the spheroidal masculine mind, slightly flattened at the poles, it sounded like an epithet and a deprivation.

"No," he said. "I'm not a hemisphere. Hemispheres do not kick."

He pulled out a ready pad and pencil. He always did when the commercial instinct suggested a shield. "Look here, let's be practical," he said. "We have paid out twelve hundred dollars for this flat in two years. What have you got to show for it? If we live in this or some

CASTLES IN THE AIR

other equivalent canal-boat till that boy is twenty-one, somebody will walk off with " — he stopped to figure a moment — "with twelve thousand six hundred dollars of our money. Do I talk like a practical man?"

"I suppose you do, John" (very demurely), "but it seems to me, and you know I'm not at all practical, that it sounds very much like a discontented pendulum."

"Well, by thunder, a man ought to be discontented when he becomes a pendulum and swings up and down twice a day across this island, year after year."

"But he makes the works go, John — when there is a balance-wheel. Isn't that what they call it?"

"You see," said John, "how marriage takes the sand out of a man. If I was unmarried you couldn't hold my nose down to this. I'd make some brilliant mistakes, but I'd hit it in the long run."

"Yes, and you would blow it all in — isn't that the slang phrase? — on the next chance."

"I wonder if I would," said John, struck with a reflective shaft.

"Sure," said Lucy; "you were that reckless."

"And now I'm getting to be a mill-horse. A fine conservative old hack at thirty, with a dead-level prospect of treadmill gentility, lined with landlords for the rest of my life. Say, sweetheart, does it comfort you to see all the fire and enthusiasm die out of your husband? Why,

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

in five years more I will be like one of those travelling things on wires that carry the money back and forth in the department stores. All you will have to do will be to stand beside your family altar and take the change out. You will not even have to shout 'Cash!' which would be a great relief to the shop girls."

Then he suddenly went off at another tangent. "Don't imagine that I have any conceited opinion of myself. I'm just the average man — when I'm out of your sight. There are thousands of us in New York who make twenty-four hundred a year. But we never get anywhere, and every year our status is more precarious. We are not professional men who can break over their boundaries with genius and make an orbit of their own. We are not skilled artisans who command capital and are necessities of labour. We are quasi business men, who have given up all risks and chances, to drudge servilely without hope. But we are genteel."

"Why do you say without hope? "

"Because the conditions of personal merit and fidelity to an employer have changed in our time. So long as our employers were individuals who trained and appreciated special fitness in their employees, and kept their eyes on fidelity, smartness, and honesty, we felt safe. It was to their interest to advance us. But all that is changing, passing into corporate irresponsibility and abstract boss-ship. Look at our friend Warner. He was with McCook & Haverley

CASTLES IN THE AIR

ten years. He knew every pulse of their business and managed his department like clock-work. He was a twenty-four-hundred-a-year man. But the firm joined a trust, gave over the personal supervision of their business to the new brand of overseers, and the first thing they did was to ship Warner, and put a fifteen-hundred-dollar-a-year man in his place. The agent said that any man could learn to do in a month what Warner did, and if the first man failed there were hundreds of others to pick from. That agent looked Warner's stock of integrity squarely in the face and remarked: 'We propose to run things on business principles with no sentiment; reduce expenses and increase profits. We estimate your worth at a thousand a year.' Poor Warner. He had four children, and he had been genteel up to the full limit of his twenty-four hundred. The agent said that the corporation did not propose to leave the question of fidelity or fitness to the individual; they had a machine which insured it. Do you know what happened to Warner?"

"Why, he was your friend who was killed, wasn't he?"

"He committed what the reckless fellows in the Astor House rotunda call 'hurrycide.' I beg your pardon for bringing their heartlessness into our sanctuary, but Warner tried to jump for an electric car, and those fellows have a ghastly humour which attributes such an act to a man who has overdrawn his accounts, or has played

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

the tape-line too rashly. But the fact is, Warner suffered a kind of moral paralytic stroke. He couldn't realize that ten years of scrupulous self-sacrificing attention to another man's business could end in that way. It bothered him, and it doesn't do for the average man to get bothered when on Broadway at the rush hour. If he takes his mind off the brink for a moment, he is gone. Poor Warner was probably thinking of his children, and the electric destroyer struck him on the left side."

"John," said Lucy, with just the slightest tone of appeal, "I never heard you talk in this despondent strain before. It is really quite pessimistic. Do the men in the Astor House rotunda indulge in such strains? I feel quite sure that something has been said to you that you have not told me."

John came and sat down beside her on a little cushioned bench and took her passive hand. "Pessimist, my dear, is the worst misfit for me that you can find in the language. I was born in a rosy atmosphere. I saw castles in the air when the rest of my companions were making mud-pies. The aureole and I understood each other without words. I heard voices when the rest of the family were asleep. Good angels came out of the ideal world and took me at my word; don't you know that, you fatuous, living corroboration of it? It is because I am such a bred-in-the-bone optimist, with such a compelling belief in the affluence and benignity of the

CASTLES IN THE AIR

ordained nature of things, that I squirm and growl and kick as I find myself year after year robbed of them and doomed to travel up and down a dreary tramway, becoming a mechanical servitor like a dummy-engine, with less sunshine and less freedom every year. I call it a preposterous hand-to-mouth existence, and we are drifting into the fatal habits of Wesley and his wife, content to snatch a few superficial excitements as we go and call them joys."

His wife was very patient under all this, for a high-spirited little woman who suggested hair-triggers. She let him run on without contradiction, and John easily thought that he was bursting upon her with his views and a large masculine initiative. Had he been less of a man and more of a woman, he would have detected in the corner of her eye a naïve confession that she had preceded him on this same route with less elocution and a finer pensive reticence, and was coyly watching him lumbering up in the same direction. But it is not in the nature of a clever little woman to dash a man's spheroidal sense of the initiative by informing him that she is still "some furlongs on before," like his ideals. She only got up and went tip-toeing to the portière, and peeped through a second, very much as the mate of a vessel goes to his binnacle and then, taking a look aloft, resumes his watch.

"John, what was it made all this occur to you to-night at the dinner table?"

"I don't know. I suppose it was the pork

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

tenderloin. I probably reasoned unconsciously that a woman who could convert pork tenderloin into woodcock, would be very apt to turn a log-cabin into a palace of the king, if she only had one of her own."

"My dear, do you think that you would be happier in a country home?" asked feminine directness.

"It isn't a question of my happiness. If you suppose that I am thinking only of my happiness, you do me great injustice. I am sure that you would be, and that's enough. It is no use our trying to disguise to each other that we are slowly falling into the careless life that Wesley and his wife lead. It is inevitable, sooner or later, in this environment, and I have an old patriarchal instinct in me—I don't know whether I inherited it from my Virginia mother or my Massachusetts father, but those antagonistic old states reached their homes across to each other like hands, and I instinctively rebel against canned life."

"Against what?"

"Canned life. Domesticity in tins. Every joy embalmed and labelled and kept on a shelf. Duties in a row, always needing the same old opener and all having the same taste. Pickled surprises, condensed amusements, concentrated religion. The same half-pint of ready-made felicity if we go out, and the same quart of refreshment if Wesley and his wife come in. Modern conveniences on wires. Immortal souls in

CASTLES IN THE AIR

model prisons. Great heavens, Lucy, think of it; blessed with such creative powers as yours, capable of—well, I will not say of making a pudding in a hat, for that's mumbo-jumbo, but of making a pork tenderloin into an astonisher. What could not your creative genius and magic fingers do if we might only jump off this shelf, and live somewhere in the bounty and sunshine of an uncanned life!"

"You were always a dreamer, John. Do you think it is quite safe for a married man to fool with these early visions? When one settles down, there must be some disappointments, I suppose—to men. We cannot be schoolgirls and wear leghorn hats and paint Marguerites after—well, not after something has happened. Wait till I see if he is awake."

When she reached the portière and her back was turned, she added, "I don't see how you can relapse into illusions when facts are so precious and practical."

"Oh, you're a woman, and can only see one concrete fact at a time. I'm a man, and I have to take in the whole future. You've only one fact in your eye. I've two."

"Two? Aren't you counting your chickens
——"

"No. The baby is so large in your mind that you can't see yourself. I have you both before my eyes. I don't believe that the youngster would have joined the trust if he could have had anything to say about it, and

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

knew beforehand that he was to be put on a shelf in this canal-boat, and become a pendulum like his father when he grew up."

Lucy laughed, and John began to scratch his head with his lead pencil, as if to disentangle his metaphors. Then he jumped up, and put his arm about his wife, and they walked up and down the narrow room a moment, while, lover-like, he dropped his voice and poured out his ultimatum to the little woman.

He had all of the average man's manliness. He was tall and muscular and full of vital energy. His hair was cut short and showed his symmetrical head to good advantage. He carried it rather defiantly for a commercial man and an employee. In Lucy's opinion he was handsome, for he had a clear dark eye, like an agate, a spare face as of a trained man, and a very superlative mustache; so the best we can do is to accept her view of him.

"Look here, sweetheart," he said, "we've got our fight to make, and we are not making it to the best advantage. All the song has gone out of you and all the dream out of me. A man and woman of our build cannot toil buoyantly unless they see the toil growing apace like a picture, with present compensations of beauty and gladness. The reward must be in the doing as well as in the ending. A few years ago I had a knight errant's bravado, sweetheart. I stood on my egotism, tip-toe, and dreamed things. Now, I feel that aggravated that I want to stand flat-footed and do things."

CASTLES IN THE AIR

"And you wanted to do them for me, dear?"

"Well, yes, that's about it."

"And you felt at times that you couldn't because you were married?"

"I felt that I ought to have done them before I got married."

"But it's absurd to think of your doing them if you were not married."

"And impossible because I am. That's the confounded snarl of it."

"Why do you say impossible?"

"Because a wife is entitled to think that they ought to be done before she comes into the scheme. It strikes me as somehow rather mean to rush a girl into a mistake, and then ask her to help you pull out."

"I should just like to know exactly what you think women were made for, anyway, John Denison, if not to help pull men out of difficulties."

"A man will do a great many things," said John, reflectively, "that he will not ask a woman to do."

"For example," remarked Lucy, and as John was thinking pretty hard, she added: "What's the use in talking this way forever? Why don't you plump it out?"

"I've been figuring on our future," said John, looking at his pad.

"And it must have discouraged you," she remarked.

"Well, yes. But there is a way out. That's what I want to talk about. I've got it all down."

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"Then you ought to look a little more cheerful."

"Our income," said John, "is twenty-four hundred a year, and so far as I can see, it is likely to be that for some years to come. We are living quite up to it. Would you like to hear the figures?"

"I'll hear them, but I fancy they will be quite familiar."

"It costs us six hundred a year for rent."

"Yes."

"Nine hundred and sixty for food."

"Is that all?"

"A hundred and eighty for help — oh, well, there's the whole table," and he handed over the pad.

Lucy took it and read it over.

Rent	\$600.00
Food	960.00
Help	180.00
Fuel	50.00
Gas	50.00
Car fare	40.00
Clothes	300.00
Lunch down town	72.00
Amusements	150.00
Life insurance	24.00
Total	<hr/> \$2,426.00

His wife's eye twinkled a little. "Why, where do you suppose that twenty-six dollars came from?"

"Don't you know?"

CASTLES IN THE AIR

"I can guess if you give me time."

"Of course you can. You took it off the edge of those other items. You cut down on food for a few weeks. I haven't mentioned church contributions, charity quarters, and extra cigars, because they all had to be chopped off that list somewhere. But what struck me was that we might cut down the whole line, make a clearing as the pioneers do, and let the sunshine in generally. But of course the pioneers were home-builders and men, you know. Would you mind looking at this other paper?" and he passed over a leaf that he had retained. It bore the same table, but it was accompanied by another, thus:—

	ACTUAL	POSSIBLE
Rent	\$600.00	\$300.00
Food	960.00	500.00
Help	180.00	
Fuel	50.00	40.00
Gas	50.00	
Car fare	40.00	20.00
Clothes	300.00	50.00
Lunch	72.00	
Amusements.	150.00	
Life insurance	24.00	24.00
Total	<u>\$2,426.00</u>	<u>\$934.00</u>
Gain	1,492.00	
Gain (2 years)	2,984.00	

He was watching her nervously, and she took some time at it. Finally she dropped the pad in her lap and said, "John, we can't be genteel on that."

"I know it," said John, "but we can be happy,

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

and we'll come out of the woods in two years, and build our own home. The only question is, can we give up being genteel for two years in order to be luxurious for the rest of our lives? It is really a woman-question, but I can hardly expect you to see it as I do."

Then she made a true woman's answer.

"As it is all for me, John, I will try and see it with your eyes."

And he acted just like a man whose speech fails him. He got up and kissed her.

Having come to an understanding, this young couple sat for two hours solemnly considering their future and the possibilities of escaping from the inevitableness of a genteel doom. John's proposition was to reduce everything to a minimum of expense for two years, and then, with the small capital, begin the task of building and beautifying their own country home. His wife had not calculated all the chances so patiently as had her husband, and she listened to him with deep interest and many secret misgivings. "Dear me," she said, "I wonder what Wesley and his wife will think of us."

Just then there came three imperative raps at the door, which gave way, and in came Wesley and his wife with the large vibration of exultant pleasure-seekers.

"Halloo, old chap," came a chipper voice from his friend, as he threw off his cape-coat and came out in full-dress, with a sprig of heliotrope on his breast. "We saw your light in the windows,

CASTLES IN THE AIR

and says I, we'll climb and stir 'em up with a rarebit."

He was very bandboxy in appearance and effervescent in action, carrying nevertheless that easy debonair manner of one who is accustomed to living in a dress-coat. While he was speaking, his wife rushed at Lucy. "Why didn't you come to dinner with us? There was the biggest crowd I've seen yet, and all kinds of people. Do you smell the tobacco smoke in my hair? Forty cents, wasn't it, Wes? Six courses and wine."

"Anything new in it?" asked John, rather wearily.

"No. Same old thing, except the people. You should have seen them."

"But the theatre isn't out yet, is it?" asked Lucy.

"Oh, we didn't stay. I had my seat next to a woman who smelt and shone so that it made me sick. I detest the smell of musk. Where's the baby? We've got tickets for to-morrow to Wallack's — new piece. You can't get out of that. Wes has four seats. Show me the baby."

"Isn't your mother coming to-morrow night, Lucy?" asked John, with an impromptu mendacity that made his wife laugh.

"Oh, yes," she replied; "I forgot that."

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Kate, "you meet me at Purcell's on Saturday — we can get our lunch and go to a matinée. Have you worn that new boa yet? Come on — show me

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

the baby." (Exit the two women in a breeze through the portières.)

"What's the matter, old man," said Wes, "are you below par? Dinner at home, eh? Well, it affects me that way sometimes."

"Oh, I had a little domestic figuring to do," said John.

"Well, I should think you got figuring enough down town. Have you got any beer in the house?"

"Sit down. Lucy will be back in a moment. Did you hear about Musgrave?"

"Yes — played the races, didn't he? How deep is *he* in?"

"I don't know. I only heard the rumour this afternoon. It will be in the papers in the morning, I suppose."

"They will do it, Jack. It's all in the way of life. I can roll a cigarette, of course? Ye gods, how his wife did splurge at the beginning of the winter. (Lowering his voice.) What are you going to do to-morrow night? We can take the women over to Wallack's and then go round for a while to the burlesque. There's a stunning lot of handsome women in that show, they tell me. Try one of these cigarettes — new brand." (Enter women.) "Say, Kate, get that extra lace off now, and we'll stir up a rarebit. Jack's sluggish."

"Oh, but we haven't any cheese in the house," cried Lucy.

"We brought the cheese with us. What did you do with the cheese, Wes?"

CASTLES IN THE AIR

"I left it on the hat rack. Excuse me. I'll fetch it. You've got beer, haven't you?"

"My dear," remarks Kate, who is trying to disentangle herself for business, "you're blue. I know how it is myself if I stay home one night. I have to take my Broadway regularly, or I have neurasthenia. Have you had neurasthenia? It's the latest. Oh, I forgot, Luce, I've struck some five-button gloves dirt-cheap. You'll never believe it, sixty cents. I was looking at some ruching, and stumbled over them accidentally. This is a pair of them. Wes says it's a mine. I wear so many gloves that I bankrupt him. That reminds me, Miss Partington had on a red dress to-night and green gloves. Society play, too. She's the worst dresser on the stage. I can't see what the papers make such a fuss over her for."

"Perhaps it's because she can act," said John. "What was the play?"

"Why, it was— Well, there, I had it on the end of my tongue. What was the play, Wes? I've got a programme in my muff."

"'School for Scandal,'" says Wes, taking off his cuffs. "Old-timer, but we had the tickets, you know. Now, then, if you'll waltz out the chafing-dish, we'll grill you one of the nimble rarebits."

When this lively pair had gone Lucy said to her husband: "Don't growl, John, they are good-hearted people, and to-morrow night is ours," and the next night John made some more tables, and drew some sketch-plans of cottages

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

which he marked "Castles in the Air No. 1 and No. 2," after Lucy had leaned over and tried her best to add bay-windows and Romeo balconies that made them look very lopsided. The heroism of their project insensibly grew as they planned it, and the consequence was that somewhere about Easter they moved into a twenty-five-dollar flat on West Eighteenth Street, it being a great point with John to get farther down town, so that he could walk to his business in pleasant weather.

The actual experience of the change was a far greater test of their endurance and pluck than they had anticipated, and Lucy had several secret crying spells, but they did not efface her determination. The new conditions, distressing as they were in many particulars, threw her and John closer together than they had ever been before. They spent their evenings at home discussing and planning, and defying all the persecutions of their new environment with hope and mutual good humour. It is astonishing what a man and woman will put up with when there is a promise of escape ahead of them. John gave up smoking cigars and took to a brierwood pipe. He let his wife put up his lunch every day in a paper packet, and he ate it exultingly down in the packing-box department when the rest of his familiars had gone to the Astor House. He bought a student-lamp and turned off the gas, and to clinch matters wore his last-year's clothes. Whenever things were pretty hard to bear, Lucy would kiss the baby and take a look at the bank-

CASTLES IN THE AIR

book. John, often during that long fight, put his arms tenderly about her and said: "Courage, sweetheart. If it were not for you I would have given up the struggle at the end of the first month. You shall be the Lady of the Manor yet. Courage."

So it was that when Easter came about two years later, and that latest member of the group had crawled out of the cradle and was toddling about, beginning to talk to his father with two syllables, John came home one night, climbed the three pairs of stairs to his flat, for there was no elevator in the house, and sitting down to his dinner, tapped his breast significantly and said, "Eureka, sweetheart."

"Has the cold in your head settled on your lungs?" asked Lucy, who once more had pork tenderloins trussed like woodcock.

"Made the last deposit to-day. There you are," and he handed the bank-book across the table.

"Twenty-nine hundred dollars," said Lucy, with a fine burst. "Why, it's beaten us at our own game."

"Yes, partnership capital. I earned it and you saved it. I take back what I said about marrying being a handicap. It's a revelation. Consider yourself smothered with congratulations, and get yourself ready for business."

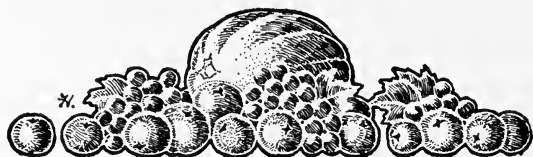
"What must we do next?"

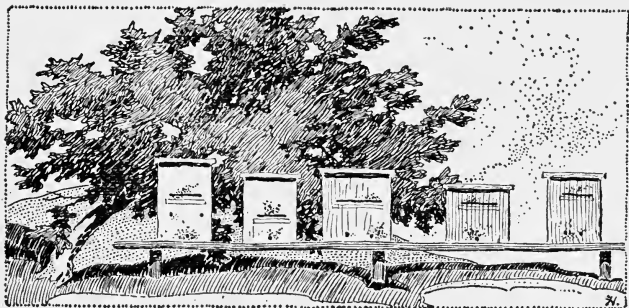
"Get up early to-morrow morning, it being Sunday, put on your warmest duds, and go down

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

on Long Island with me to look at a place which is advertised in the *Herald*. Can't we leave the baby with the janitor?"

"Heavens and earth, I don't think you know what you are talking about, John. I'll send for mother."





CHAPTER II

THE SEARCH

JOHNN DENNISON and his wife were ordinary human beings like the most of us. Neither of them had the remotest idea of doing the heroic or the romantic thing according to the current examples. But we must not forget that the great bulk of the heroism of life lies among the uncelebrated persons who do their duty unflinchingly and never know how heroic they are.

A very practical and a very common ambition had taken possession of John. It had been months growing. It was to possess a home of his own that would return him something for all his labour on it, both in the shape of physical benefit and mental satisfaction. He and his wife had come to understand each other, and they had accomplished the first and probably the most difficult step towards it. They had by dint of

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

self-sacrifice and some humiliation of a very natural pride, saved up the money that was necessary for a start. It had been a long and often a wearisome struggle. But it had been lit by a new companionship and common purpose, and made endurable by a new hope. The next step promised to be more springy. It was to begin the search for a spot somewhere on earth that they could make their own and join hands still closer in the beautifying and preservation of it.

The effort that looked so pleasant in the prospect proved to be beset with disappointments, aggravations, and discouragements before they came in sight of the final results. And you must understand that, however much in common a man and woman may have in life, however close they grow together in affection and in purpose, one remains masculine and the other feminine to the last. Try as they will to see things with the same eyes, things insist on looking unlike to them. Lucy's idea of a future home had been slowly shaping itself in her mind. A cottage meant to her a solid, embowered, and inviting stone house, with bays and recessed portico and mullioned windows, all smothered in guelder roses and vibrant with the songs of birds. She had probably caught this picture insensibly from some English book, and it was associated in her mind with beehives and nodding poppies and vistas of lawns and hedgerows. John, on the other hand, probably saw the thing in its crudest and most elemental condition, and found all his

THE SEARCH

satisfaction in creating the other thing out of it. This is the difference, as you shall see, between the masculine and feminine point of view. John was to find out that what he wanted was not to be had for the asking. He cut advertisement after advertisement from the papers, and he went off on many journeys of inspection and learned a good many sound lessons before he got through.

The first of these journeys would have dampened the ardour of almost anybody. He had cut from a newspaper the following advertisement:—

“For Sale—on Long Island, farm of twelve acres, with cottage in good condition; thirty-five miles from City Hall. Good, productive, healthy site. Terms easy. Apply to Ira Quick, Limecliff, Long Island.”

Sunday morning was selected, and John took his wife with him. The railroad did not reach Limecliff by two miles, but they encountered Mr. Ira Quick at the last station, where he kept a livery stable, and he promptly offered to drive them down. The way was not inspiring. They crossed vast downs, studded with advertisements; they passed through one or two nascent cities, rectangularly laid out but not yet budding into houses. They sped along against a brisk wind, seeing very few signs of spring. The skunk cabbage showed green spots in the lowlands, and there were some verdant gleams of grass in sheltered places. A premature bluebird twittered occasionally. The general aspect was raw, un-

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

kempt, and barren, save where German women, despite the day, were working in their truck gardens.

"Think of farming?" asked Mr. Quick, who was a short, thickset, black-whiskered man with a horsey air, a large watch-chain, and a cigar, which latter he used mainly for masticating purposes.

"In a small way," answered John, evasively.

"Chicken farming?"

"No, sir," emphatically.

"Well, you see it sets that way generally with most of the city people. I thought I'd ask. Tried it before, maybe."

"I am simply looking for a place that will furnish me with a suitable home."

"And we are quite particular about appearances," added Lucy; "it must be inviting as well as productive."

"Then you've struck it between the eyes, and dirt cheap," said Mr. Quick. "Want a place, I dare say now, that will suit the lady — no mosquitoes, chance for lawns, flower-beds, and all that sort of thing. I've just got it."

Mr. Quick, being a horse man, was very anxious about the high-stepping team that he was driving, which was unusually fresh, and once or twice he got out and gave his attention to the harness. The roads were in that condition that is experienced only in the early spring after a long frost. They had been cut up into heavy furrows by the truck wagons of the farmers, and had

THE SEARCH

frozen into cast-iron ridges, the outer surface of which the warm sun was now converting into a slippery slime, so that the light wheels of the vehicle slipped and fell and twisted about in a manner that produced upon Lucy the effect of a very large Faradic current. She was beginning to experience a pain in her back, when Mr. Quick ran his horses up to a board fence, and jumping out, began to tighten his straps here and there. His two companions surveyed the landscape in silence. It was an open prospect, for Long Island at its best is not Alpine. They saw one house, not unlike an exaggerated dog kennel, sticking up in the near distance and breaking the horizon line as a buoy in the ocean might do it.

"Anything the matter with your harness?" asked John. "How much farther have we to go?"

"No farther. This is the place. You'd better get out here where it is hard."

"You sit still," said John to Lucy, "and I'll go and take a peep at it."

"But where is the cottage?" she asked. "Let us drive to that. It's more important than the soil."

"There you are," said Mr. Quick, pointing to the dog kennel.

"That lonely thing?" asked Lucy, with unbounded amazement, standing up in the vehicle.

"Looks a little rough this time of year, you know," said Mr. Quick. "You won't know it

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

in two weeks. I s'pose you understand," he added, turning to John, "that the real advantage of this country is that we've got the Gulf Stream within reach. The farmers up state would give a good deal to have the Gulf Stream flowing past their acres. Why, we're three weeks ahead of Jersey with our peas, and as for spinach, well, sir, it'll squeeze through the snow if you don't watch it. Let me show you the house."

"I don't think we care to see the inside," said Lucy; "it wouldn't suit us."

John was not so rigid. "I think we'd better look at it, now that we're here."

"Of course," observed Mr. Quick, leading the way, "you are a practical man and understand it's the soil that tells the story. What you want is a fine, sandy loam with a tight subsoil, isn't it?"

"What's the price of this property?" asked John, cutting him short.

"How high do you want to go, Colonel, for a farm? I have refused fifteen hundred dollars, spot cash, for this eligible piece. Did you think of doing anything in cabbages?"

"What is the use of our looking at this place, John?" said Lucy.

"Because if you did," continued Mr. Quick, ignoring the lady entirely, "I can give you a pointer — stick to the early Wakefield. If there's any cabbage in the market that the Gulf Stream takes to, it's the early Wakefield. There will be a great rush down here in a year or two.

THE SEARCH

The papers haven't worked the Gulf Stream yet. Now's your time to jump in."

This experience stuck up in Lucy's memory for a long time, like the sharp roof of that house. She never forgot the forlorn aspect of the cottage, and she always referred to it as the "Gulf Stream residence." To her eye it was like a lost spar in the ocean, and she thought of herself clinging to it and waiting for her husband night after night, making his way from the nearest station. When she parted with Mr. Quick, it was with something of a suppressed hatred of him, as if he had made a dastardly attempt to smash her ideal, and he, with an easy combination of horsey courtesy and rough irony, tipped his hat to her and invited her to come down again when the weather was settled. "There might be a triumphal arch or two and a pianer on the lawn, seeing that those were modern conveniences when a man wants to farm."

Altogether this experience was an unfortunate one, and yet it taught John several useful lessons. One was not to prospect on Sunday; another was to make some inquiries by mail before spending money on railroad trips, and above all not to take his wife until he had made a preliminary examination. "Good Heavens," he said to himself, "if I wanted her to plant roses, I wouldn't take her into the manure heap with me first."

But John was not discouraged. At the solicitation of a friend he investigated Staten Island. But that beautiful sea-swept domain seemed to him, on examination, to be a very delightful

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

metropolitan convenience only, where happy people, mainly in search of sea air, could always have the city in sight and be quite sure that it would not disappear while they were bathing or cutting their lawns. Its accessible nearness was not an advantage to him. He thought he detected in the worried aspect of some of his business friends who lived there, a continual responsibility with regard to the ferry-boat. They held their watches in their hands at the theatre, and generally hurried out before the play was over. The atmosphere of the city extended to Staten Island. (Since John made his visit the authority as well as the atmosphere of the city has extended there.) When he inquired what a man could do for himself on a piece of ground 100×50 , he was triumphantly told that he could fill his lungs with sea air, and to John's practical sense this seemed an insufficient pastime.

Then he journeyed up the Hudson as far as Scarborough to look at a snug little farm on the hills. Here, again, he fell into the persuasive arms of an agent. Scarborough is a delightful hamlet just above Tarrytown, lying in a cove of its own, and forever gazing into Haverstraw Bay with dreamful eyes. The snug farm was a mile and a half from the station. There were seven acres and the remnants of a solid old-fashioned farmhouse thereon, canopied by some ancient apple trees. But stretching away on either hand were vast parks; great preserves of the men who, instead of going to Paris when they die, take it

THE SEARCH

out of the Hudson while they live. The price of this remnant of former agricultural days was six thousand dollars. It took John's breath away, but the agent pointed out the view and the neighbours. "You have the Beekmans on one side and the Rhinelanders on the other. You can look into the Rockefellers' grounds from your second-story window, and throw a pitchfork over into the Shepards' from your barn. There is no other place on earth where land brings you into such good society."

"But I'm not buying land to get into good society," said John.

"No?" queried the agent, with a slight loss of respect in his manner. "Not trying to get out of it, I hope?"

"Well, yes — rather."

"Haven't you come to the wrong market?" asked the agent. "Perhaps you'll object to the view."

"No — only to the price."

"That's what we're selling up here. You ought to go over the ridge on the Northern Railroad. Why don't you try Elmsford? Property drops a couple of hundred dollars an acre as soon as you get out of sight of this noble river."

This astonishing piece of information was verified by subsequent examinations, and John learned by slow degrees that a man with only two or three thousand dollars could not afford topographical æstheticism. He was also slowly learning that there was a distinction, sharp and clear,

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

between rural and rustic. Rural meaning country life that does not relinquish the city, and rustic meaning country life that is independent of it, and doesn't care much more than a dollar and a half after haying time for it. To enjoy the unquestioned privilege of easy and uninterrupted railroad facilities, genteel neighbours, macadamized roads, picturesque surroundings, and above all, VIEW, was to become a suburbanite. He found that he could live thirty miles out on the Hudson, and come to the city every day at a commuting rate of eight dollars a month. He could get home at all hours. There were theatre trains all the year round, and all the morning papers for breakfast. In addition to this, one enthusiastic friend had told him that the price of land kept out an objectionable class of people, and they were rustics. Most of his friends had been buying modern conveniences in the rural market ready made, and were paying handsomely for the goods. Why was it not possible to construct beauty and independence your own way from the bottom up, with the safe assurance that the conveniences would come along in the course of time?

April and May had slipped away and part of June was gone. As the warm weather overtook him and his wife in the cheap flat, he began to get restless. He felt that he had deprived his wife of many of the comforts and luxuries of a genteel home, to which she was entitled, with a plea of great achievements, and so far they had come to

THE SEARCH

naught. Lucy did not upbraid him in words, nor did she complain, but her appearance itself was a continual reproach. He saw that she was wearing her old dresses, and that the drudgery of economy and a narrow routine were beginning to tell in her face. Much of her enthusiasm had cooled and the embowered cottage of her dreams had receded under the pressure of trivial and incessant duties. But, woman-like, she did her best to disguise this from her husband, and when he had fits of discouragement, she cheered him up. "Don't get blue, John," she would say; "you will accomplish your purpose in time. Have patience." But a man is usually so built that patience in inaction is an impossibility. That is why he is such an inferior invalid to a woman. If he cannot overcome, he collapses.

"Sweetheart," he said to Lucy one sultry morning, "you must get out of this with the boy. Go away to the seaside. Go home to Holyoke. Do anything for a change, before the summer is over. I'll rough it here without you."

"That's very well meant, John," she said, "but it wouldn't make it any pleasanter when I got back. I'm all right as I am, but I would like to send Harold away till fall. It does seem to be a shame to coop him up here all summer. Wesley and Kate have gone to Narragansett Pier, I suppose, by this time, for their vacation."

"Yes," said John, rather resenting the suggestion, "and it will cost them ten dollars a day. What will they have when they get back?"

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"I can't imagine, unless it should be brighter spirits and better appetites."

"By heavens," said John, flaring up instantly, "you shall go to Newport or Cape May and spend twenty dollars a day if you say the word. I can afford it better than Wesley, and you have earned it. All you have to do is to crook your finger."

After this he gave his attention to the railroads that focussed themselves in Jersey City. In a broad way he conceived of them as running off southward to genial climes through Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, but beset anywhere within reach of New York City by populous manufacturing centres. His recollection of journeys in that direction when going to Philadelphia or Washington, was of Newark, Passaic, Trenton, Elizabeth, hives of workers, with an atmosphere of smoke, and who retained in their communal aspects the groupings of the great masses in New York. Somehow it seemed to him that he did not belong to these energetic toilers, and could not take his wife into a manufacturing district.

Unguided and undetermined, he one day looked down the long lists of stations duly scheduled under clock faces in the Erie depot. There were so many branches of travel that they tangled themselves in his mind. He wondered at the innumerable towns that he had never heard of and could not fix on the map. But some of the names sounded pleasant and invit-

THE SEARCH

ing: Ferndale, Hohokus, Mount Ivy, Oradell, Riveredge. One of these columns ended suddenly with Suffern, as if that were a kind of pastoral limit, and Suffern he knew by reputation. He remembered that an old friend of his father's lived somewhere in that vicinity. The next minute he had bought his ticket and was climbing aboard an Erie train, guided only by a sudden impulse. In an hour and a quarter he was at the little station, looking about him at the great gap in the mountains, and wondering to find himself so suddenly at this unexpected Alpine gateway through which one must pass to traverse the state.

If the reader will stop here a moment and look at the map of the country immediately west of the Hudson, he will see an arbitrary line, drawn diagonally from a point on the Hudson River a few miles below Piermont, running northwest through the middle of Greenwood Lake, and ending against one of the outlying spurs of the Blue Ridge. This is the New Jersey state line, and north of it lies an interesting triangle, each side of which is twenty miles long and which encloses two hundred and eight square miles. This is Rockland County, New York. Its northern point is not more than fifty miles from the City Hall in Manhattan, and its southern limit now comes within a pistol-shot of the extended city. But to this great dense and tumultuous world, the domain is virtually a *terra incognita*. It is known only by its suburban towns here and there

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

on the Hudson, such as Stony Point, Nyack, and Rockland Lake, or Suffern and Tuxedo on the Western trunk line of the Erie road. Between those points lies, in its original serenity and wildness, an unknown pastoral tract of diversified beauty, untouched by the hand of speculation and undisturbed by enterprise. Its roads are possibly the worst in the state. Its railroad facilities are uncertain and wide apart. Its villages are isolated and moss-grown. Its inhabitants, save along the boundaries where travel goes by, are the descendants of the original Hollanders who settled it, and who have left upon it their incorrigible antipathy to change or improvement.

Originally this tract of country was included in Orange County, and the whole domain flowed with milk if not with honey. Our fathers identified milk and cheese with Orange County, and felt grateful to Rockland Lake in what they called the heated term, for it furnished them with ice. Further than this the world was not interested. Two trunk railroads now traverse the county. But they give little heed to it, for they concentrate their attention on what is called "through travel." Rockland County is regarded in an indulgent way as something to be crossed in getting out of or coming into New York City.

This bit of history and topography is necessary if one is to understand the surprise of a man like John Dennison when he finds himself left by the ongoing railroad at such a station as Suffern. He feels that he has severed the link that con-

THE SEARCH

nects him with a competing and conquering world. He ought to have gone on. If he leaves the safe vicinity of the railroad, and goes through the gap of the hills into Rockland County, he will be lost in a Beulah Land, where there are no trolleys, no asphalt, no building associations, no department stores, no roof gardens, no ambulances, no slums. Nothing but sleepy old roads with stone fences on either side covered with bittersweet and blackberry vines; nothing but old houses hiding among lonely cloisters of beech and butternut. Somewhere the little Mahwah River will come flashing and singing down from the hills to join the Ramapo, and together they will set out wandering in the most reckless manner to find the Passaic, and then they have fallen nine hundred feet, for that is the height at which the man stands in upper Rockland County above sea level, and, save for the distance, he would have to look down at his feet to find it.

Such absolute rusticity so near to the great city cannot be found in any other direction. From any of the highest points one can always see at night the great electric aureole of Manhattan in the southern sky. From Mount Ivy one can discern with a glass the pier of the Brooklyn Bridge when the air is clear. From the knolls of Tuxedo the mists and reflections of the Atlantic shimmer low down in the east, and from the jagged peak of the Thor at Haverstraw, the waterway at its feet spreads out into an inland sea and lies like a shining pathway to the Narrows.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

John went into the nearest village store and inquired for Philip Swarthout. The young man who was drawing molasses asked him if he meant Pop Swarthout — he was over back three miles. John got the direction, went to a livery stable, hired a buggy, and set out eastward to find Pop Swarthout. He said afterward that as soon as he left the village he felt like a man who had lost the combination. In ten minutes he had abandoned the last vestige of metropolitan life. He looked about in vain for the familiar advertisements on the rocks. One or two daintily dressed bicyclists passed him as they hurried back to their summer boarding-houses in Suffern. He jogged leisurely along the road, which was on a low terrace that followed the curves of a little river, and was buttressed on the other side with the great hills whose redundant vegetation swept down to the highway itself, and often completely arbour'd it with oaks and chestnuts. As he left the sound of the coughing locomotives behind, songs of birds and the murmur of the water enhanced the drowsy stillness. The smell of hay came heavily down the valley, and he could at intervals hear the click of the machines in the distant meadows. Occasional-shingle roofs peeped from the trees in the middle distance, giving evidence of carefully screened and modest residences, but there were no gentleman's grounds, no park palings, no preserves. Everything wore a luxurious and tangled unconventionality. The hedgerows bent over the roads in inextricable snarls of dogwood and

THE SEARCH

elderberry. The paths wound through waving June grass and timothy. Agriculture had not parted company with landscape. Most of the houses that he passed were separated by long and often half-wild tracts. But there were comfortable, unpretentious, and unmistakably country houses, half hidden by old trees and wearing heavy veils of Virginia creeper and wild trumpet-honeysuckle. Nearly always they were enclosed by old gardens in which phlox and lady's-slippers and tansy were conspicuously mixed.

It was evident to John that he had reached a country where both the Gulf Stream and the human stream had ceased from troubling, and where, he suspected, it might be always afternoon. When he had gone about two miles he came to an old-fashioned white picket fence running along the road, with a piece of white paper tacked on the gate post. He got out and read it: "This house is for rent. Inquire of Philip Swarthout." The house stood about sixty feet from the road. It was an old red sandstone affair, a simple parallelogram without ornament except the climbing roses had covered one end of it. It stood in the centre of a wooded area, several fine old trees throwing their shadows across it. He tied his horse and went into the enclosure. The path was overgrown with waving June grass. He knocked at the door, and after several knocks receiving no answer, he walked round to the rear, and was surprised to find a big porch running the entire length, and flanked at one end by a honey

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

locust and at the other by an apple tree. The ground swept in a gentle slope to the river, which he could see flashing and dancing through the trees, as it wound along a lush meadow. He sat down on the step of the porch and enjoyed it. The Ramapo Mountains rose up in the west, with their forests and cliffs sharply defined, and in the gaps he could see the billowy distances of the Blue Ridge. It was a singularly restful and beautiful scene, and he wished he had brought Lucy with him. "I wonder," he said with unconscious irony, "what this view is worth — probably something utterly beyond my means." He knocked at the rear door and got no answer, but mechanically trying the knob, it opened into a little vestibule. He knocked again, but there was no response. He looked in at the nearest room. The sun was pouring in through the festoons of roses round the deep windows. There were several pieces of furniture of antique shape and a rug or two, but the place smelled of soot. He walked to the window and admired the deep stone sill with its drift of rose leaves in the corners. The breastwork of a brick chimney projected into the room, and the fireplace was closed with a framed canvas upon which were painted, in bold artistic way, some ferns and cattails. A few imprisoned wasps were weakly crawling over the panes. When he tried to open the window he found that it was nailed fast, and he wondered why any one should nail the windows and leave the doors open.

THE SEARCH

Then John went out again upon the porch, and noticed for the first time a pail with a scrubbing brush in it, and a new broom lying close beside it. This was like Crusoe's discovery of the footprint, and almost immediately there rose up from the June grass a stalwart maid, with high cheek bones, cold blue eyes, and a gaping mouth full of white teeth, with her sleeves rolled up and her red hands on her hips, looking at him with astonishment.

"I was just examining the house," said John. "I see it is to be rented. Where is Mr. Swarthout?"

The girl, still staring, said: "He? He in the grass is."

"Good heavens!" said John. "How long since it happened? I didn't know he was dead."

"He ain't dead. He's gettin' in his early hay—over there," and she pointed one bare arm in an uncertain direction. "Are you hiring it?"

"Well, I might be. Do you live in it?"

"No, I'm going to clean it."

She pointed once more with her arm, and John set out to find Mr. Swarthout.

He discovered him at last in his hay field superintending the men who were getting in his crop. He must have been at least eighty years old, but he had that shrivelled activity and sly acumen which belong to these veterans of the field, and he handled a rake with easy dexterity. When John told him who he was, the old man looked him all over, grunted, and said: "Yes, I

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

knew your father. He'd known better than to make a visit in haying time."

John saw the significant looks of the men, as if they were saying to each other, "Oh, the old man will take the conceit out of him."

"I didn't come to make you a visit," said John. "I wanted to inquire about a piece of property you have for rent. If I interfere with your haying, I will find somebody else whose hay doesn't interfere with his humour," and John turned on his heel.

"Hold on," said the old man, throwing down his rake. "Want to rent, do ye? Tell you how it is. I've got a nice piece of grass here, and these men are workin' by the day. You see I wanted to get it in." This was meant to be apologetic.

"Perhaps you'd better not bother with me, then," said John.

"So you're old John Dennison's son, be you? Come from the city, I s'pose."

"You've got a house down there on the road with a bill on it which says apply to you. Have you time to give me some information?"

"Gosh, 'pears to me you aire in a hurry."

"Not at all; I have plenty of time, — more time than patience, as you might say."

The old man drew him on one side. "Want to hire for the summer, I s'pose?"

"I'll tell you what I want to do when I know what you ask for the place."

"Well, now, young man, I'll tell you how it

THE SEARCH

is, if you'll let me do it in my way. I built that stun house sixty year ago. There's a bit of five acres that I set off to go with it when I sold it."

"Sold it? Isn't it yours?"

"Yes—it's mine. I sold it but it came back to me. Country property has a way of doin' that, 'specially when men that buy haven't got much patience. Then, you see, I rented it; calculated to get the interest on it. It's worth a hundred dollars an acre. Countin' the house in, I expect to get fifteen hundred dollars for it. At six per cent, that would be ninety dollars a year. I've got that for three months in the summer. Did you think o' buyin'?"

"Had a notion of that kind," said John. "Did you think of selling?"

"Sell anything I've got 'cept the family Bible, if I git me own price. Let me see, what kind o' business did you say you was in?"

"Real estate business at present," said John, throwing out his chest.

"S'pose you come down to the house," said the old man. "I guess these men will get along for a bit without my watchin' 'em. I calculate you won't stay up here more'n three months, and I'd have to ask you the same rate as fer a year."

"If I come here at all," replied John, "I shall live here permanently. Do I understand you to say that you will take fifteen hundred dollars for the house and five acres?"

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"That's what I'm askin'. It's an old-fashioned house, but it's solid, and so am I, young man."

"There is some furniture in the place. To whom does that belong?"

"It belongs to me. There was a pair of gadding young painters hired the house last summer, and I had to furnish it. You don't do any painting, do you?"

"I'll make a thorough examination of the property and give you an answer before three o'clock to-morrow," said John. "You'll have your hay in by that time, I suppose."

The old man's eyes twinkled a little. "I've got two hands yet," he said. "One of 'em can fix your business whenever you're ready."

John thought that one of them might have been extended more cordially, but he only said: "All right, I've got two that are disengaged. I'll use them both between now and three o'clock to-morrow. Good morning."

"Hold on, young man, you're a deal younger than I be and do things on the jump. You'll have to hire that horse agin to come back here."

"Certainly."

"Well, if you stop here you won't have to. You might as well save a dollar where you can. I'll send your horse back."

"Thank you," said John; "I might be in the way."

"I dare say," replied the old man. "Young men who jump about as you do are very apt to

THE SEARCH

be, but we might do some business while you're skipping round."

That was the way in which rustic hospitality lumbered up in the rear of business.

So John stayed there, and the next day he surprised himself and then surprised Lucy.

But for that we shall have to go to the next chapter.





CHAPTER III

THE HOUSEHOLDER

THE next morning John Dennison made a careful and long examination of the stone house and the grounds. Mr. Swarthout, who accompanied him, was astonished at his deliberation and particularity. He did not understand that John was measuring the possible while examining the actual house. He saw him pace the length of the wooden paling in front, and heard him say, "It is about two hundred feet." The house stood sixty feet from the road and faced northeast. Its length was about fifty feet. There were six trees between the door and the gate: three chestnuts of ample breadth, a beech, and two elms. On the south of the house was a bunch of cedars, another elm, and a mass of shrubbery. The house itself was a massive, unadorned structure, with a door in the centre opening into a square hall or vestibule, on the south of which a partition divided the breadth of the house into

THE HOUSEHOLDER

parlour and dining room. On the north were two similar rooms, one of which had been used as a kitchen and the other as a bedroom; intermediate were stairs, hallway, and closets. The walls, of red sandstone, were eighteen inches thick and twelve feet high to the eaves.

John mounted the stairway and found two bedrooms, over the parlour and dining room, that were lathed and plastered. They were twelve feet square, and there was space at the northern end of the floor for two more. The vines were so thick about the windows that they darkened the rooms, and a thousand bees were humming against the panes. The dust lay half an inch thick in corners, and the cobwebs were pendulous from the ceiling. John measured the spaces with a two-foot rule, marking the results on a pad. He poked his fingers into the shingles at the eaves to see if they were rotten. He gave the old man an improved opinion of his keenness.

Then they walked over the grounds, going down the long slope through the clover and the June grass, where at one time was a path still clearly defined by the lilac, syringa, and witch-hazel bushes on either side. Between them the wild pinks, the dandelions, and the red clover were matted inextricably together. The boundary line of the property on the north was marked by a heavy stone fence three feet thick and four feet high. John waded through the grass and inspected it curiously. Its lower line of stones was made up of large boulders, some of them as

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

big as a barrel, and their faces were covered with lichen and moss. He knew instinctively that several generations of farmers had pulled them out of the adjoining fields and piled them up there. The picturesqueness of the sturdy breast-work, a thousand feet long and embroidered with blackberry vines, did not occur to him then. He was thinking of it as a quarry.

"You wouldn't object, I suppose, if I took the upper end of that down and put a wire fence in its place? It would look better from the road," said John.

"Never object to anybody's buryin' a stonewall," said Mr. Swarthout. "If he can stand it, I kin."

"I don't suppose there is any drain from the house?"

"No, sir. We didn't build drains when that house was put up."

"How far is it to the river?"

"I calkilate about a thousand feet."

"Five-inch drain-pipe," said John, reflectively, "at twenty cents a length—cost me about a hundred dollars."

"What will?"

"A good drain."

Mr. Swarthout himself considered. "A man at one-fifty a day will dig fifty feet of drain a day, and fill in a hundred a day. The way I figure, by leavin' the pipe out, it would cost you forty-five dollars. I wouldn't throw money away."

"No, I don't intend to—at least not on doctors."

THE HOUSEHOLDER

"You ain't goin' to do any manufacturin' business, aire you, in that place?"

"I expect to live in the place if I buy it. I am trying to make up my mind if it will be habitable."

"Say, look here, I don't know what your tastes aire, or what kind of business you might want to carry on," said Mr. Swarthout, "but there's another place about half a mile further up the road that might suit you better. 'Tain't so exposed as this, and ye ken hev it fer half the price. I've got my horse out there; s'pose you jump in and take a look at it."

"Very good," said John, climbing into the wagon. "I might as well see all your goods."

John was then taken up the road, and when they arrived at a wild piece of timber Mr. Swarthout hitched his horse, and they made their way through the underbrush to the bank of the stream, where there stood one of those extemporized houses that tourists and sportsmen sometimes throw together for temporary use. It was a story-and-a-half house with battened sides, and a chimney in the middle of its peaked roof. It was enveloped in foliage and weeds, and had been used the year before as an outing-box by a party of anglers, who came up for trout fishing.

"I think," said John, "that you might throw that in if I buy the other place. I could use it as a smoke-house."

"Well now, see here, my friend, this is a good, quiet spot. With a little draining and filling

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

in, and grubbing out a few trees and bushes, it wouldn't be such a goldarned bad place, after all, if a man wuz lookin' fer quiet and wanted to improve."

John looked into the house and fancied that it smelt fishy. It then occurred to him that the wily old man had brought him there to enhance the value of the other place by contrast, which John thought was not such a bad idea, after all, and he might work it himself with Lucy. They then started back and resumed their inspection of the former place, John desiring to see the property from the foot of the hill.

When they reached the bottom of the declivity they were among the alders and dogwood that were interspersed with some heavier birches and chestnuts that shaded the bit of meadow. It was a very pretty, sylvan spot, upon which the buttercups, forget-me-nots, wild pinks, and oxalis were in full bloom. The little river, twenty feet wide, moved sluggishly through sunshine and shadow along the level among the trees, fringed by herbaceous growths, through the openings in which one could see the cattle grazing on the opposite slopes or lying partly hidden in the meadow-fesque. A cool, damp air, fragrant with flowers and hay, swept by the two men lazily, but they gave no heed.

"Mr. Swarthout," said John, "I have made a pretty good estimate of your place. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you fifteen hundred for it, one thousand down, and five hundred to remain

THE HOUSEHOLDER

on bond and mortgage for five years at six per cent."

"You think of improvin' it, don't you?"

"I certainly do. It isn't exactly what I wanted, and is hardly fit for my wife in its present condition. But if I buy it, it will be for a home. What do you say?"

"Well now, I'll tell yer. I like to help a man who goes in fer improvements, and if you don't want to pull on your capital, I'll take half down and let it run for three years."

"No. I've made my calculations to a cent. You've heard my offer. Five hundred is all I want to carry. It will take two or three thousand dollars to put the place in shape."

"Hev you figgered to spend that?"

"The roof leaks. The well runs dry in October. The bedrooms are unfinished. The boards in the back porch are rotten. The front fence has to be straightened. The ground is overrun, and the house has no drainage. The only things about it that recommend it are its site and its solid walls, but I suppose there are plenty like it, if one could hunt through the county."

"Yes, that's so, young man; but you won't find anybody that's agoin' to throw in half an acre of garden planted. You see I calkilated to rent it this summer, and so I hed that garden sot out."

"I'll take a look at it," said John. He found an ample kitchen-garden laid out with a row of raspberry and currant bushes along the stone wall

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

facing the southwest. The result of this investigation put him in a good humour, and he went back with the old man to his home and there the agreement was made.

"I shall go down to the village," said John, "have the title looked into, make a deposit, and sign the papers as soon as the lawyer can make them out and my wife arrives. You see, I've got a two-weeks vacation, and intend to finish up the matter while I am here. I shall sleep in the house to-night, if you don't object. I saw a cot there and a blanket. Perhaps you can tell me of a good man that I can hire by the month for general work on the place."

"You can't hire 'em in hayin' time, unless you pay 'em more'n they're worth."

"Then I'll pick up a man in the city," said John; "it's full of men."

The next morning about half-past four he woke up just as the sun, like a spark, was burning through the eastern trees. He sat a moment on the edge of the cot in his own house, and felt that he had taken a desperate step. The first question that he asked himself was: "What will Lucy think of this? Well, I've taken the fatal plunge, and I guess I've got to make it all right. A woman expects a man to bring her a scheme under way, and not do any of the extra hustling herself." That conclusion reassured him, and he proceeded to make himself a cup of coffee in the fireplace. While he was thus employed, he heard the cornet-voice of the Norwegian maid

THE HOUSEHOLDER

outside, and the next moment her stalwart form and good-natured face appeared in the doorway, a generous picture of innocent astonishment.

"You live at here?" she inquired.

"Yes, I buy him," said John, unconsciously adapting himself to her idiom.

"So? You hire me?"

"Yes. Do you work by the day or the week?"

"I work so I get the most money."

"What is the most?"

"One dollare a day."

"All right. What's your name?"

"Tilka."

"I'll hire you for a week on trial. I want somebody to help me get this house to rights so I can bring my wife."

"So? Goot."

"Open all the windows and the cellar door. Scrub all the floors. Carry all the rubbish outside, and tell me where I can get a man to cut the grass."

"You buy me a scythe, I cut it myself."

He looked at her with admiring awe. "You'll have enough to do," he said. "Can you cook?"

"You bring some food, you shall see. Mabbee you hire my man."

"Oh, you have a man. What can he do? Can he take care of a horse?"

"So well as if he was born in a stable. I can myself take care of him."

"Can he plough?"

"He can that plough almost so well as myself."

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"Where is he?"

"Mine Gott, he works in the hay for one dollar and a half a day for three days, and then he waits three months for nothing, because one dollar and a half a day is too much. It is better, I think, to work steady for not so much, ain't it?"

"Much better," said John. "Bring him here to-night so I can see him."

As he swung off down the road he saw her looking after him, with her hands on her hips, a lusty figure, that made him think of one of Rubens's pictures that he had seen somewhere. The two-mile walk at that hour was a delight. The river accompanied him the greater part of the way, now brawling and plashing with a pleasant noise, and now spreading out hushed into shadowy pools, flower-fringed. He strode along with an exhilaration that was new and unaccountable. When he thought of it afterward, he was amazed at the amount of work he did that morning. But it is so with all of us. When a creative emotion takes possession of us, our faculties surprise us with new energies, and events imitate the rapidity of our thought.

John was now mainly intent on preparing a surprise for his wife. Instinctively he felt that it was his duty to accomplish instead of theorizing any longer, and he proposed to himself to take the initiative and show Lucy his dream in full swing. Something told him that she was beginning to regard his scheme with doubts, and had too much affection for him to tell him so. This

THE HOUSEHOLDER

consideration more than any other, perhaps, influenced and piqued him that bright morning, giving him an urgent and slightly authoritative air that he thought of afterward with some amusement.

It was nine o'clock when he found the office of the lawyer to whom Mr. Swarthout had recommended him. As the gentleman was not yet attending to business, John went over to the railroad station and looked at the time-table. There was a train at ten-thirty. That would get him into New York somewhere about noon. It would take him an hour to go to the bank, get his lunch, and an hour to get back. He would be in the cottage again by three o'clock, prepared to do business. He walked to the largest store, found that their delivery wagon would be going up the road early in the afternoon, bought some groceries and ordered them sent to the cottage. Then he hunted up the lawyer in his office, a Mr. Braddock, a comfortable, middle-aged person with gray-white side whiskers and a beaming face. He was engaged with a toy, trying to get three or four globular little pigs into their pen. He greeted his visitor pleasantly, offered him a wooden chair, and without relinquishing the puzzle, listened indifferently and amiably. "I've searched the title of that property three times within two years," he said. "There's an abstract of it in that pigeon-hole. You can have it for five dollars," and Mr. Braddock smiled as if legal business were in some way a practical joke that he

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

occasionally indulged in. "Think of buying the place?"

"I have bought it," said John. "Mr. Swarthout will be here to-day to have you make out the papers."

A pleasant smile spread over Mr. Braddock's face as he turned the puzzle in his hand. The humour of making out papers appeared to be a pleasant memory.

"Coming up here to live?"

"Yes — hope to."

Mr. Braddock hunted the pigs a moment reflectively. A mild recognition of the pleasantries of coming up here to live seemed to flit across his face, as if it were one of those plaintive joys that are pleasant to dwell upon.

"I want to catch a ten-thirty train," said John. "If you will give me that search I will pay you. I expect to be back here at three o'clock to make a deposit, and have the papers ready for my wife's signature when she arrives."

Mr. Braddock took the search out of the pigeon-hole. It was neatly folded and indorsed, but rather dusty. He handed it to John, after knocking the dust off, put the five dollars in his vest pocket without looking at it, very much as if it were an allowable interruption, and said:—

"Have you seen this new toy? It's quite ingenious."

"No," replied John. "I'll study it when I have more time. You don't know of anybody who has a cheap horse to sell, do you?"

THE HOUSEHOLDER

Mr. Braddock walked smilingly and leisurely to the door of an adjacent office, stood there a moment turning his pigs over, and then said incidentally as he looked at the toy, "Benton, did Sully get rid of that horse he was trying to sell?"

"Guess not," said a boy's voice in the next room. "Saw him driving it yesterday."

Mr. Braddock came back to his desk, took a card and wrote on it, "Salem Sutton, horse for sale," and handed it to John, with a superior and complacent irradiation that made the whole transaction look like an amiable indulgence.

At two-twenty John was back from the city at the depot, and not long after three o'clock he and Mr. Swarthout were bowling along the road in the latter's box-wagon. As they came along John said: "If you can pick me up a cheap horse somewheres that will not be too disreputable to take me to the depot, and not too proud to plough, I'd like it. What ought I to pay for a makeshift brute?"

"Better wait till fall," said Mr. Swarthout. "That's when they get rid of 'em so as not to hev to feed 'em all winter."

"But I can't wait — must have any kind of an animal at once," and he pulled out the lawyer's card. "Do you know that man?"

Mr. Swarthout could not read it without his glasses, and John read it for him.

"Sale Sutton. Oh, yes, I know both animals. How high do you want to go?"

"Don't know. I suppose I can get a horse at

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

one of the car stables in the city, a little foot-sore, for fifty dollars; that will answer my purpose for a while."

"Better lemme buy Sutton's horse for ye. He'll soak it to yer."

"Very good," said John. "I'll leave it to you."

About an hour later, and just as John was washing himself in a pail of well-water preparatory to sitting down to an extemporized dinner that the girl had prepared for him, Mr. Swarthout drove in with Sutton's horse hitched to a rather dirty and wobbly box-wagon, and John had to go out and inspect the animal. It was a gaunt and gothic, dirty-white specimen of equine architecture thick about the ankles, large in the hoof, slightly corrugated in the flanks, and a little harness-worn on the shoulders. John looked at him in dismay, for he had nourished a picture of a pony in a chaise with a woman in a lawn dress driving in a sprightly manner to the depot to meet her husband. Mr. Swarthout interpreted his disappointment very correctly.

"You want a horse that's good for three or four years' hard work, don't you, and that will feed up respectable when he gets where there's oats, and you don't want to pay over fifty dollars? Now, that animal ain't no thoroughbred, and Sutton sprained his off hind leg draggin' ice up the mountain last winter, but there's five hundred dollars' worth of work in him with good treatment, and he's yours for thirty-five dollars. You take my

THE HOUSEHOLDER

advice and buy him. He's only nine years old. I know when he was foaled."

Somewhat against his inclination, John agreed to buy the horse, and then Mr. Swarthout suggested that the harness, with a stitch or two in the breeching, was well worth five dollars; and as for the wagon, it was sound in spoke and axle, and if there were new washers on the wheels and a bit of paint, it would make a serviceable runabout and was well worth twenty-five dollars. "If I wuz goin' in fer improvements," said the old man, "that's just the kind of jumper I'd snap at."

As John stood there considering, he saw Tilka's broad face at the window, and she beckoned to him earnestly.

"Wait a moment," he said, "till I come back."

When he was in the house Tilka said, "How much he sell you for, that wagon?"

"He wants twenty-five dollars for it," said John.

"Mine Gott, I could buy him yesterday for fifteen dollares."

"All right," said John, "you buy him. I'll give you a dollar. Here, I give you sixteen dollars."

"I don't want the wagon," said John, coming out. "I'll take the horse and the harness for forty dollars. But I've got a girl in there wants to buy a wagon."

"I buy him, I buy him!" shouted Tilka, rushing out and shaking her money.

"Why, what will you do with the wagon, Tilka?" asked John.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"Mebbe I go into piziness wid my man. I could buy him yesterday for fifteen dollares."

"Well," said Mr. Swarthout, "you give me the fifteen dollars. I can't afford to send down here to take it away again."

When this bargain was completed, Mr. Swarthout coolly told John that he had made five dollars on the operation, for he had got the horse for thirty dollars. "But," said he, "you don't object to that, when you've got a bargain?"

"Well, I'll tell you, neighbour," said John, "you expected to make ten on the wagon? But you ought to look into a man's mouth as you do into a horse's when you try that kind of business. If you'll look into mine, perhaps you'll see that I've got my eye-teeth cut."

This seemed to tickle old Swarthout, and he went away shaking with quiet satisfaction.

"Tilka," said John, as he sat down at the table and admired her stalwart form while she stood between him and the fireplace, not unlike a beaming caryatid, he thought, ready to uphold the whole scheme with her sturdy shoulders, "how much of the house did you clean?"

"I clean him all," said Tilka. "I clean two houses like this in one day. You do not send me a scythe so I shall cut some grass this evening."

"No," remarked John; "I don't want such a jewel as you are cutting grass. Where's your man?"

"He come right away. I give him his supper here — you don't care?"

THE HOUSEHOLDER

"Does he know anything about a garden?"

"He knows almost so much as I do myself."

"Does he drink?"

"Shust some beer when he can get. That is notting, I guess. I drink some myself."

Half an hour later, as John was sitting on his back porch, smoking his pipe and surveying his domain, Tilka's man made his appearance, and John then remembered to have seen him in Mr. Swarthout's hay-field. By the side of Tilka he looked a little dwarfed and submissive. He was undersized, sun-browned, and unkempt, but sinewy withal, and suggested, as so many of the field hands do in that part of the country, that all of the natural juices have either been evaporated by exposure or concentrated somewhere out of sight.

"What's your name?" asked John.

"They call me Mart up here. I guess that will do for everyday use. Martin is what it was in the first place."

"He is that ashamed of his name that is foolish," said Tilka. "I think it is Martin Luther Smidt, when I was to him married then."

"Very well, Martin Luther," said John, "eat your dinner and then come out here, and I'll tell you what kind of a reformation I have in my mind."

It was very pleasant out there just at that time. The western glow gave a golden radiance to the wild stretch. The swallows were darting in the evening air. A heavy odour of flowers hung about the place, and the stillness was soothing. Pres-

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

ently Mart came out and stood with his hat in his hand. "I want," said John, "to get the place thoroughly cleaned up at once; the grass cut; rubbish burned; fence-posts straightened; stable cleaned and patched up; garden attended to; horse cared for; supplies brought from the town, and between time, all the help you can give here in the house. Can you plough?"

"He can plough so good like I can myself," said Tilka.

"How about gardening?"

"It is so good a garden as you will not see in a mile. I make him myself," replied the girl.

"You want all this done in a week, boss?" asked Mart.

"Yes," said John; "I'm not going to hire you for a year at a dollar and a half a day. You can make up your mind to that. I'm hiring you for a week on trial, because I like your wife. If the prospect scares you, say so at once, and I'll look out for some one else."

"I guess he will that do as I think," said Tilka. "It is much petter, I guess. He can that work so much petter as he looks; but he talks not so mooch as me."

Tilka's exuberant vitality was a constant wonder to John. She had an unfailing fund of strength that nothing exhausted, and it always manifested itself with a copious good humour that was admirable. Her husband was not unlike a domestic *protégé* that had come obediently under her executive wing, and was quite content to let

THE HOUSEHOLDER

her take all the credit for his methodical toil, as it saved his breath.

"I suppose you can milk?" John said to Tilka.

"I milk four cows every morning before breakfast for two years," said Tilka. "I think you keep not more as one."

"Well, Mart," said John, "I've hired your wife. Suppose we consider you thrown in for a week for a dollar and a half a day?"

Mart laughed silently, and waited for his wife to answer.

"I guess," she said, "he is so good as hired," and then she laughed, too.

Contrary to appearances, John found that Mart had considerable character of his own, which he took good care never to put in the way of his wife's lusty and exuberant egotism. It was an understood arrangement, apparently, that she was to make her vitality represent the firm. But the moment Mart began to swing a scythe, John saw, in the steady gait and dexterous rhythm, that he knew his business. "How much grass is there on this place?" John asked.

"I cut a ton and a half last year off it," said Mart. "I guess it's about the same this year."

"What's it worth?"

"Ten dollars a ton."

"Fifteen dollars," said John to himself. "Why, I'm a speculator. How long will it take you?" he asked.

"I can cut an acre and a half a day," said

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

Mart, "if you push me. I can borrow another scythe, and my wife can help me, if you're anxious."

"No. We'll take it easy and clean up the top of the hill. The garden's the main thing. What do you want for that?"

"It's got everything in it but tomato, egg-plant, cauliflower, and late cabbages. You can get the plants in town. There's peas there ready to pick now, and lettuce and radishes."

"What, ready to eat?"

"Yes, and they ought to be tended to. The pie-plant ought to hev been pulled a week ago. You'll have strawberries there to-morrow."

"Strawberries?"

"Lots of 'em. The patch was only set out last year. Do you think of gardening?"

"That's the proper thing in the country, isn't it?"

"Do you expect to sell?"

"Can't sell much off five acres, I guess."

"Not such an awful deal," said Mart, "but the lower part of that field is pretty good soil, when the rest of the hill goes dry. I think I could squeeze out a couple of hundred dollars on celery there."

"I'll think about it," said John, as he walked away.

The next morning he let Mart drive him to town in the old wagon. He stopped at the wheelwright's. Some new washers and a new whiffletree improved the conveyance consider-

THE HOUSEHOLDER

ably, and the wheelwright suggested that a coat of paint would make it a very respectable wagon. As for the horse, several cleanings and a bag of oats had surprised him into a state of activity that was encouraging. When they came slowly back the wagon was fairly loaded with an extraordinary freight, the necessity for which had never before entered into John's calculations. He looked at the bill with some dismay. There were fifty items on it for preliminary trifles that his two confederates declared were absolutely necessary. Among other things he had bought himself a pair of overalls, a blue flannel shirt, and a stout pair of working shoes. Thus equipped, he went about his outdoor task with a good will, somewhat surprising Mart, who was evidently studying his employer keenly, and trying to arrive at some kind of estimate of his resources and status.

By Friday an enormous amount of work had been accomplished, and John set off in the afternoon for the city to bring his wife. He lingered a moment at the front gate to look at the place, and felt that, squatty as it was, it now bore the appearance of a veteran whose beard had been shaved and hair trimmed.

The hour's ride on the train gave him time to reflect, and he began to study his memorandum-book. He was rather appalled, when he saw the sum-total, at the amount of money he had already spent. The items were innumerable, and the page looked like this:—

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

Paid on Property	\$1,000.00
“ Lawyer	5.00
“ for Horse	35.00
“ “ Wagon	15.00
“ “ Harness	5.00
“ “ Tools	5.00
“ “ Horse-feed	1.15
“ “ Provisions	4.80
“ “ Nails, tacks, wire, etc. . . . .	.60
“ “ Lime, soap, soda, etc. . . . .	.45
“ “ Washers and whiffletree	1.80
“ “ Pails, brushes, etc. . . . .	.95
“ “ Window-glass and putty . . . . .	.48
“ “ Bucket and rope for well	1.55
“ “ Overalls . . . . .	.60
“ “ Heavy shoes and shirt	3.50
“ “ Wall-paper and hanging	9.50
“ “ Barrel of kerosene	6.00
“ “ Coal	5.50
“ “ Buggy hire and car fare	3.80
“ “ Tilka	1.00
Due for help	15.00
Miscellaneous items	5.00
Total	<u>\$1,126.68</u>

Under the general term of “Miscellaneous” were included such necessary trifles as curry-comb, stable broom and fork, matches, screw-driver, scythe and sickle, and wheelbarrow.

Having studied this grim setting-forth to his heart's content, he consoled himself with the idea that he had bought everything in the world that he could think of, and pushing the book into his pocket, he went into the smoker and began to calculate the effect of it all upon his wife. He arrived in the city about seven o'clock in the

THE HOUSEHOLDER

evening. On the ferry-boat he met an old artist acquaintance of his wife's whom he had not seen for a year, and who was returning, he said, from a tramp out in Jersey. It was a fine opportunity for John to ventilate his new proprietorship and see how it worked. "By Jove," he said, "the country is beautiful. I've just come down from my place, and I had to tear myself away."

"Your place? Are you living in the country?"

"Why, certainly. You must run up this fall when the autumn foliage is right. I'll have my wife drive you around. She will be delighted to see you. Fresh vegetables and milk will set you up, old fellow. You really must come up."

"Sure," said the artist. "You can depend on me. Where is your place?"

"It's in Rockland County. All you have to do is to come to Suffern, and let me know when you're coming. I'll meet you with the team."

This sounded so fine to John that he was tempted to carry the experiment a little beyond bounds, and had to restrain himself.

He found his wife sitting in dishabille at an open window, fanning herself, with her face set in a reproachful expression of injured innocence. He bravely put his arm about her, gave her an unceremonious kiss, and proceeded at once to explain and apologize.

"You see," he said, "I wasn't coming back this time without something to show. What you want, my dear, is results, and you want them

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

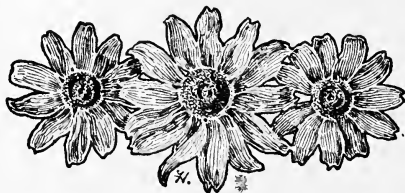
before the summer is over. Well, you are to get up early to-morrow, and take the boy, and tell me if I have found the thing of which we are in search. Did you ever hear of the Mahwah? I never heard of it myself until a few days ago."

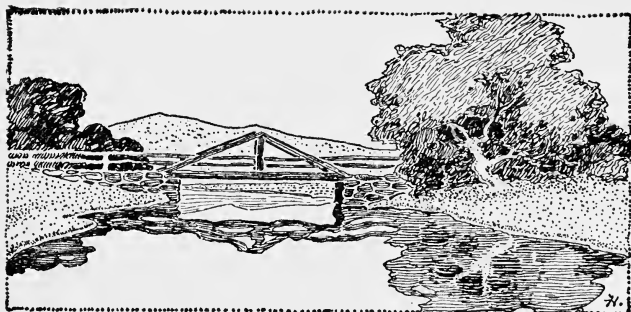
"No," said Lucy. "What is it, a river?"

"Yes, the most beautiful little river you ever saw."

Lucy looked out of the window and merely asked:—

"Is it connected with the Gulf Stream?"





CHAPTER IV

ON HER OWN THRESHOLD

IT was a shining June afternoon when John Dennison, accompanied by his wife and boy, set out for the country. He had not told her that he had closed the bargain. Perhaps he knew best how to deal with his own wife, therefore it hardly becomes us to criticise him. He hired a conveyance when he got off the train, and they were presently driving along the river-bank, John calling attention to every special feature of beauty as they passed.

"There are two places," he said, "that I want you to look at. One is in the woods, and is not only remarkably cheap, but is beautifully situated on the river, away from the road and delightfully sequestered, you know. The other is more swell, perhaps, and nearer the town, but I don't think it will meet our views so well. I am going to leave it all to you to decide, and I am anxious to

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

see if you will agree with me. One of them we must have."

"But isn't it a lovely country!" said Lucy. "I'd like to wade in that cool river. It reminds me of Holyoke. I do believe those are elm trees; and there are pond lilies. Tell the man to drive slow. There is an old mill—as sure as you live, it is the regular old thing. It makes me want to paint. I haven't seen it for years—since ——"

"Well, what do you stop for? Since when?"

"Since you and I sat on the old flume and I tried to make you think I was an artist."

"You didn't have to try very hard, sweetheart. Do you see that white house through the trees up the road, beyond the bridge? That's where Mr. Swarthout lives. He owns about a hundred acres all around here."

They were driving past the old stone house just then, and he caught a glimpse of Tilka at the corner of the house watching out for them. But Lucy was looking straight ahead, trying to follow the direction of John's finger, and Tilka was left behind in a state of wonderment. They had to stop several times so that Lucy could jump out and gather some of the wild flowers. It did his heart good to see her old sense of enjoyment come back. Poor girl, her eyes sparkled and a new colour gave a pleasant animation to her cheek. She had not had an outing for two years.

When they arrived at the wild spot where John and Mr. Swarthout had gone through the jungle

ON HER OWN THRESHOLD

to the solitary cottage, he said quite cheerily as he assisted her and the boy out: "We have to go through the woods—there's no path. But that gives a fellow a fine opportunity to do his own clearing. I always had an idea that a house hidden away from the road must be cosy and quiet."

Lucy was too much engaged with the wild beauty of the tangle to pay much attention to him, but when they came to the house itself John pointed to it with mock pride and said, "Now, there's a nook in the wildwood that I instinctively felt would catch your artistic eye—it's so embowered."

Lucy struck an attitude of wonder and remarked: "That thing?—Let's look at the other one."

"Now, my dear," began John, "consider the practical advantages. In the first place, we've got water at the door. When the cellar is pumped out—by George, I forgot to look if there is a cellar—and it's cemented, the trees cut away, the roots pulled out, the land filled in and ditched and drained, and a road made through the thickets, it will be quite ideal."

"Dear me, it makes me tired to think of it," said Lucy. "Don't think about the house. Let us take a walk down the bank and look at the river."

"Don't you want to see the arrangement of the rooms?"

"I'll take your word for it. If you have set your mind on that thing——"

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"But I had rather you were perfectly satisfied before I bought."

"Well, of course, if you think of buying that, I shall do my best to be satisfied. But wouldn't it be cheaper to hire a tent?"

"I know it looks a little lonesome in its present condition. But when we have cleared away the forest and redeemed the land and rebuilt the house——"

But Lucy had taken her boy's hand and was walking toward the river. John followed her.

"The place doesn't please you," he said. "There is no use in our staying. We might as well go and look at the other spot."

When they entered the vehicle he continued in the same strain to praise the secluded wildness and even to hint that he had her artistic love of Nature in view in selecting it. She did not encourage him, but gave herself to the luxury of the drive, and when they arrived at the stone house, she remarked: "Why, I noticed this house when we drove past," and he wondered if she had seen Tilka out of the corner of her eye. "This is my second choice," said John. "We have two hours before our train time, and we can take a leisurely look at it." As the team drove away he had to explain to her that it would come back for them when they wanted it. "Now you will observe," he said, as they went up the path and he led the way round to the rear of the house where the view at that moment was at its

ON HER OWN THRESHOLD

best, "this place has five acres, but it is more exposed than the other."

"What a splendid view!" said Lucy.

"True—it couldn't be finer, but we have to consider if views will return anything. Suppose we sit here on the porch a moment and I'll tell you all about it."

Tilka had placed a commodious and comfortable rocker there. John pulled it round gallantly, and Lucy sat down. The roses hung round her, and the golden light danced through upon her. John thought that she looked more like his old sweetheart than she had appeared for years. The distant hills were rimmed with a soft purple, and the valleys between poured a splendour of sunset through that tipped everything with a golden radiance. Somewhere a song-sparrow was bubbling over with a vesper prelude. The little river spun itself in yellow meshes down among the trees. The air was heavy with the odour of flowers and hay.

"You see," said John, "this place belongs to Pop Swarthout, and there is a Mrs. Smith in it taking care of it for him. We'll go in and look at it presently when you are rested."

"We must not forget our train," she said. "I shall be starved to death before we get to New York, and Harold must be very hungry. I wonder if we could get a glass of milk here?"

"Oh, I guess so," said John, quite indifferently. "Let me tell you about this place. Are you comfortable?"

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"Very. I wish we had more time."

"Plenty of time, my dear. Do you know, you look just like my old Holyoke girl as you sit there under the roses. Confound it, I think the air up in the woods by that sylvan cottage has brought back your old expression. Well, as I was going to say, Swarthout wants fifteen hundred for this place, but I can get the other for five hundred, and I have always said to myself when I found my extravagance running away with me, I will take my wife's advice."

"There are many old houses like this in New England," said Lucy, musingly, as she rested her chin on her hand and gazed away into the purpling west. "I think it is rather colonial. Not one of them ever has a bay. I used to wonder if our grandfathers knew how to make a bay."

"It's the easiest thing in the world to put one on. I'll show you my plan for improving — that place in the woods."

"How many rooms are there?"

"In that little cottage?"

"No — in this."

"I'll show them to you — but first we must get a bite."

Tilka appearing at the door at that moment, he said, "Mrs. Smith, this is my wife, Mrs. Dennison. I want to show her over the house. Can you give us a bite of something to eat?"

The women looked at each other with quick appraisement, and Tilka said: —

ON HER OWN THRESHOLD

"The dinner has that long been waiting for you that it will soon be no good."

"Dinner," cried John, jumping up. "What a capital idea! Come, my dear Harold, my boy — dinner. How does that strike you?"

He gave his wife his arm with a sudden courtliness, and Tilka held the door open as they went in. Even a tired and hungry woman must melt under this treatment.

Tilka had prepared a banquet. That exemplary Norse woman rose in John's estimation suddenly to the proportions of a gigantic fairy. She had obtained a white cloth somewhere and the pine table disappeared under an inviting spread, with a monster dish of lady's-slippers garnishing the centre with dewy colour. She had managed to roast a little breast of lamb — Heaven only knows how — before the open fire in the kitchen. She had fresh peas that melted in the mouth, and little round crisp radishes; heaped-up bowls of luscious strawberries and jugs of cream from Mrs. Swarthout's; a white loaf of home-made bread and a platter of fresh butter from some unknown source, and to cap the climax, a lettuce salad, cool and fresh and odorous.

Tilka had served everything at once and stood proudly surveying her performance with her bare arms akimbo.

"Are you not going to sit down, Mrs. Smith?" asked Lucy.

"I guess you talk some business, hey, ain't

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

it, while I do my work?" said Tilka, backing out.

"Extraordinary consideration on the part of Mrs. Smith," said John, *sotto voce*. "My dear, I hope you've a good appetite."

"It's a luxury to eat a dinner that somebody else has prepared," said Lucy. "Where do you suppose she got those splendid berries?"

"Why, she picked them in the back yard. That woman would make her fortune if she had a piece of land — like that we saw in the woods — and it was all cleared and drained. Don't hurry — plenty of time. I want you to walk down the hill and see the grove and the river and the garden and the stable."

"Why, is there a grove — and a river — and a garden — and a stable?"

"You bet," said John. "Every modern convenience except hot and cold water, stationary tubs, and gas. Let me help you to some more of these peas — they, too, are out of the back yard."

"I'm afraid," said Lucy, "that we are robbing Mrs. Smith."

"Very well," said John, "if you have any conscientious scruples of that kind, watch me — and Harold. You do the talking."

Presently, when the meal was finished, John took his wife through the rooms, venturing to disparage them a little with great delicacy. The large chamber overhead with its rose-embroidered windows and its meagre but tidy furniture, with

ON HER OWN THRESHOLD

a bed on which was a spotless and restful white counterpane, caught Lucy's eye. "What a fine room we could make of this, John, if it only had a bay window."

"Do you think so? You should have seen the rooms in the other house."

They inspected the kitchen and walked out to the brow of the hill, and Lucy showing some signs of weariness, John led her back to the porch again. She would have given much to have been able to take her corset and her heavy shoes off and sit in that rocker for the rest of the evening. But what does a man ever know of these things?

"You don't say much, my dear," remarked John. "I've been waiting to have you decide. Can't you make up your mind?"

"You prefer the other place, don't you?"

"I'm going to leave it all to you."

"Well, as I feel a little tired, we can talk it all over as we go back to the city."

"Oh, no, let us make up our minds while we are on the spot," said John.

"Mine is made up," said Lucy. "I much prefer the house in the woods."

"What — you don't mean it?"

"Yes. In the first place, it's so sequestered, and you have set your mind on it."

He looked at her with considerable astonishment. "You are not serious," he said.

She kept her face very straight, though she turned her head a little away. "Yes. The

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

other place has grown on me since I've been here."

"Oh, but I'm not at all set on the other place, my dear."

"What — not set on the filling and ditching — and grubbing — Why, John, do you know, I think it would be quite a novelty to live in a bath house."

Then she broke down and began to shake a little, and John began to whistle.

"Sweetheart," he said, "I give it up."

"Oh, don't," she replied. "You brought me to this dreadful place so that I would appreciate the other, didn't you? For Heaven's sake, let us go back to the sylvan spot in the wild wood." Then she put her handkerchief over her mouth, and there was nothing left for John to do but to pull it away, at which she said quite earnestly: —

"It's all right, John. Now let us catch our train. I'd like very much to spend a day or two here, but I must get back where I can take my things off and think it all over."

"You don't have to go back to do that," exclaimed John. "I smuggled your wrap and slippers into my travelling bag. They are up in your chamber. You can make yourself comfortable in your own room and get a good night's rest, and be up with the lark to eat a breakfast that will be waiting for you without your getting it. It's all yours, and all you have to do is to take possession and put your name on the bond. It's all done and fixed beyond recovery."

ON HER OWN THRESHOLD

“But Mrs. Smith?”

“Don’t say a word against Mrs. Smith. She is a fireproof brick hired for a week and subject to your orders. Now go up and make yourself comfortable, and hurry down. I’m going to give Harold a ride on the back of our horse. Did you catch that?—our horse, he’s of Arabian blood. Wait till you see him.”

Lucy stood alone in the chamber, gazing thoughtfully through the roses. To be so suddenly converted from a guest to a hostess and mistress was a little confusing. There was something like a suspended pout on her lip. John, at the last moment, had left her out of the determining act and consummated their scheme in his own way. The pout grew a little more distinct. Suddenly she heard the voice of Harold, and she pulled the roses at the window aside and looked out. The boy was seated on the white horse, his father holding him on as the animal came slowly through the grass under the window with his head down. She heard John telling the boy that it was a work horse, but that his mother was going to have a pony and then she would let him drive it, wouldn’t that be fine?

The evening light fell across the group pleasantly, and they looked very happy. The pout slowly disappeared. After all, she said, he is thinking only of me. Then she hurriedly put on her wrap and went down.

It is worth noting that a change of attire sometimes affects a woman’s disposition. Lucy came

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

out quite buoyant and beaming. When John said apologetically that the horse was only a "preliminary plug" to do the rough work, she patted him on the neck and said she thought he was "just lovely."

The June twilight fell on them, walking together under the trees; the stars came out; the frogs began their evening hymn before Harold evinced signs of sleepiness and they returned to the house. John had to show her every point of vantage, and colour it with his ideal improvement. When at last they sat down in the chamber and Harold was put to bed, Lucy said, "Now then, John, you've shown me everything except the accounts."

Out came the pad. She looked it over somewhat rapidly and said: "Are you quite sure that it will bring all the results that you have been dreaming of so long? I almost tremble for fear you will be disappointed."

"And so I might be, if it were a dream. But it isn't. It's a plain matter of fact. I've kept to the mathematics of it with my teeth set, and I am determined that it shall be no dream for you. The great job for me will be to make it worthy of you."

That was quite rhetorical for John, and to take the edge off, he paraded his pad.

"Listen," he said. "I've calculated that we cut our rent down to fifty dollars a year. That is the interest on five hundred dollars and the taxes added. Just take that piece of paper and

ON HER OWN THRESHOLD

pencil. I'd like to see what you make it. Have you got rent, fifty dollars?"

"Yes," said Lucy. "Rent — fifty dollars."

"Then put down help, man and woman, twenty-five dollars a month — that's three hundred a year — Have you got that?"

"Yes, but where is the help to come from at that price?"

"Never mind that now — we'll ask Mrs. Smith about it to-morrow. Put down commutation at nine dollars a month — that's a hundred and eight, isn't it?"

"Yes — a hundred and eight —"

"Horse and cow at a maximum — say one hundred and fifty a year."

"Gracious," said Lucy, "I didn't know that cows cost anything to keep in the country!"

"They don't, after you've been in the country long enough. Now add living expenses — say twelve hundred a year. What do you make it?"

"I make it one thousand eight hundred and eight dollars. My, country life comes high, doesn't it?"

"True — but consider what we are getting for the money. There are some things that do not figure up well. First of all, we've our own home. Then we have our girl back where she belongs — out of the kitchen. Finally we have a prospect. There isn't a mathematician on earth can put that down in numerals. Every stroke of work we put upon this place is like putting money into the savings bank. I feel like

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

going and hammering a nail in somewhere now — don't you? Then there is something more, but I don't figure on it yet. I only contemplate it as an alluring margin. That garden ought to pay our interest and cut our living expenses down one-half. We've been figuring on a cow as an expensive luxury, but she might turn out to be a handy producer."

"But, John," and this was said with a hesitating reproach in it. "You haven't said a word about the sixty miles of railroad travel every day; the ride from the station in all weathers; the possibility of accidents."

"No," said John, carelessly; "and I haven't said a word about the luxury of doing one's duty when it isn't a hardship, and taking the man's load on one's own shoulders and redeeming the promise that I made to you when you took me for better or worse. I haven't said a word about the roses that will come back into your cheeks, and the songs that will begin to nestle around your heart again and break out from our baby's lungs. I haven't said a word about the inspiration there is in work and danger and drudgery when love stimulates them and victory stands ready to crown it all. Do you think I can command the language to do these things justice?"

"Why, yes," replied Lucy. "Do you know that as you stand there now, it seems to me that you would have made a splendid exhorter. Mrs. Smith will think you are preaching."

John laughed. "I guess she takes me for a

ON HER OWN THRESHOLD

missionary already and expects me to convert her man."

"Then I'll encourage her in the morning by telling her how you converted me. Now, I'm going to bed, for we have to catch the train in the morning."

"Can't you get that infernal train out of your head? You're not half converted. If you were, you'd go to bed and sleep without a thought of trains. You would know that I will go to the city, bundle up all our effects, and dump them at your feet here, and all you have to do until they arrive, is to take your boy by the hand and rest yourself among the roses, and let Mrs. Smith do the walking with her stalwart legs. If you are not converted to that extent, then have I preached and plotted for nothing."

It was not so easy to go to sleep with all these things tumbling over each other in her mind, but somehow the soft, cool air, with its burden of rose bloom, swept past her steadily as she lay on her pillow, and presently she sank into a half-consciousness that love was deliciously fanning her with a new wing.

The next day, being without John's stimulating presence, she set about her own unbiassed scrutiny, as a woman will. She inspected everything carefully, noted that the kitchen had no shelves, that the vestibule was dark and narrow, that the ceilings were low, that all the water had to be carried from the well, that the boards in the floor were not altogether level, and that the plaster was

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

smoky. Then she went out to see how the house looked from the road, and could not help wondering how it looked to other persons who passed by. Did it strike them as a gentleman's place? It was certainly very old-fashioned and plain and just a little bit lonely. What would her friend Kate say to it?

While she stood there, leaning thoughtfully upon the awry fence, a buggy, driven leisurely by an elderly man, stopped in the roadway opposite the gate. The man had on his knees a bag containing something. He leaned out of the vehicle and saluted her with what she thought was a superfluous amount of smiling good nature.

"Good morning, Mrs. Dennison," he said; "I am the lawyer that your husband may have mentioned to you. Braddock is my name. Do you know anything about cats?"

"Cats?" repeated Lucy, with some wonderment, as if she had misunderstood him.

He held up the bag smilingly, and Lucy saw that something inside it was moving.

"They say," said Mr. Braddock, "that if you carry a cat in a close bag for three miles and turn the bag around several times, the animal will not find her way back. Do you know anything about it?"

"No, I don't," replied Lucy, a little tartly. "What kind of a cat is it?"

"Just the ordinary kind. Black cat. I'm very much interested in the experiment."

"Is it a good ratter?" asked Lucy.

ON HER OWN THRESHOLD

"Just the ordinary ratter," said Mr. Braddock.

"Why not give it to me, poor thing? I am very fond of cats, and I may need it in this old house."

"Yes, you will need a cat," said Mr. Braddock, with an irradiating smile of satisfaction. "These old country houses swarm with rats. I'll send you up a cat. How do you like tortoise shells? —they are generally considered good ratters. Perhaps you would prefer a Maltese cross?"

The man was evidently insane. Lucy stepped toward the gate for security. "What has a Maltese cross to do with cats?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon," he replied. "I should have said a cross of Maltese stock. I suppose you intend to improve the old house?"

"Why, yes — such is my husband's intention."

Mr. Braddock seemed to glow with exultant satisfaction at the idea of improving the house.

"Just so," he remarked; "modernize it, I believe, is the word." And he put his hand softly to his mouth, as if to restrain a too exuberant sense of humour. "I'll send you up a modern cat, Mrs. Dennison."

Lucy's eye flashed a little at his benignant irony. "Don't rob yourself," she said. "My husband will probably get a mastiff to protect the place, from — rats, and other things —"

"Just so. Mastiff for rats," and up went the back of his hand to his mouth to check his hilarity, as if mastiffs for rats was one of those dear old witticisms that fill the heart with kindly mer-

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

riment. "We are going to lose one of our oldest inhabitants, Mrs. Dennison — Jacobus Sneider — he lives three miles up the road and is on his death-bed."

Lucy noticed that his eyes twinkled as he said it.

"I was going up to make out his will. They *will* die, you know."

"What is the matter with Mr. Sneider?"

"Nothing. He's just doing the ordinary dying. You see he's ninety odd years old and he has lived here all his life. Death has no surprises for such a man. In most cases the distinct line between living and dying is obliterated long before the end approaches. I have a paper that needs your signature, Mrs. Dennison. Perhaps I'd better stop and have you sign it."

Lucy wondered if this was a ruse to get into the house while her husband was away. But before she was aware of it, Mr. Braddock put the bag containing the cat under the seat, got out, hitched his horse, with an indulgent smile, and she was compelled to accompany him to the house. As he held the parchment down with one hand on the table and pointed with a long finger of the other hand to a spot where Lucy was to write her name, he remarked with a winning complacency, "The women told me that I should have put the cat in a covered basket instead of a bag. It doesn't strike you, my dear madame, that such a trivial difference would make any change in the experiment, does it?"

ON HER OWN THRESHOLD

Lucy looked at him with that monitorial air of reprimand that comes so easily into a woman's face.

"Did you say that your friend up the road was dying?" she asked.

"I may have mentioned it," he replied, with a new smile that seemed to indicate that dying had touched some pleasant chord of humour in him. "You have made up your mind to settle here among us, I believe."

"Isn't that question rather superfluous, Mr. Braddock, after I have signed the paper?"

"Perhaps it is — perhaps it is," said Mr. Braddock, as he waved the bond in the sunlight to dry the name. "I shall assume that you intend to, and will send you up the cat."

She watched him with staring curiosity as he went back to the buggy. In spite of his beaming affability, he left behind him the impression that he was laughing in his sleeve at John's experiment, and Lucy could not help feeling a sudden hatred for him. "I believe," she said, "the man is half-witted." She saw him climb into his buggy and deliberately turn round the bag containing the cat, and then take his hat off and salute her before he started the horse.

"Tilka," she said, "are there any rats in this old house?"

"Rats?" exclaimed Tilka. "I guess there are not so much rats as one, else I find him."

The girl had a large basket on one arm and a tin pail in her hand. "I think," she said, "you

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

come to the garden with me and see what it will grow for you."

Just as they started out to find the garden, a woman in a sun-bonnet, black dress, and white apron appeared at the stone fence and accosted them with a call. She had evidently come across the field instead of taking the road and was stopped by the breastwork.

"It's Mrs. Swarthout," said Tilka. "She make call on you, I think."

"Aire you Mrs. Dennison?" called the woman.

Lucy put her hand to her mouth, trumpet-fashion, and called back: "Yes, I am. Who are you?"

"I am Mrs. Swarthout. I came over to see about the milk."

Lucy looked at Tilka.

"It is the pay for the two quarts of milk what I have got," said the girl.

"Will you not come in, Mrs. Swarthout?" called Lucy. "We have no telephone."

"No, I thank you," Mrs. Swarthout called back. "I only came over to see about the milk. You had two quarts."

"Gracious," said Lucy. "Did we?"

There was a space of seventy-five feet intervening between the conversing women, and as Mrs. Swarthout did not intend to come any closer, Lucy must advance or continue to shout. She rather resented Mrs. Swarthout's irrational proceeding, and held her ground. Tilka had no such scruples. She dropped her basket and pail and said:—

ON HER OWN THRESHOLD

"You give me ten cent for the two quarts and I fix him."

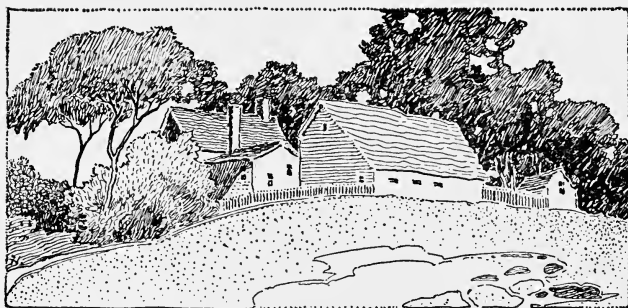
"Is that what the woman is screaming about?" asked Lucy, as she felt in her pocket.

Tilka laughed as she took the ten cents. "It is goot business, I think."

"Rather picayune business," said Lucy, as she went off toward the garden.

It thus happened that her introduction to two important personages in the little drama she was to play was rather unfortunate, and as is often the case, she utterly misinterpreted both the lawyer and the farmer's wife through her first impressions of them.





CHAPTER V

THE INCIPIENT GARDEN

“MOVING in,” to use Lucy’s phrase, was an episode of ruction and destruction. The men who had been hired to bring the chattels from the station in a capacious farm wagon, drawn by a team of stalwart horses, invested the affair with the responsibility and importance of a crisis. It took four men to do what two men would have done in the city. The team was stalled twice on the road, and the neighbours turned out with fence rails and crowbars and extricated it; small boys rose out of the earth, cavorted round like young Indians, and followed the procession up to John’s gate with wild hopes of a breakdown. So that when the cavalcade arrived in the road opposite the house, Lucy and Tilka came hurriedly out to learn what the noise was about, and saw a council of war being held, and were told that the fence would have to be

THE INCIPIENT GARDEN

taken down to drive in. Lucy stared at her household goods heaped up recklessly into a top-heavy pyramid, with Harold's baby-wagon clinging to the top, and mattresses, chairs, and many articles of private worth stuck on in ludicrous defiance of their associations, and exposed to the appraisal of the county. "Oh, dear," she said, "why did not John get a covered van?"

She stood there and watched with trepidation the tremendous operation of getting into the grounds. The noise and animation lifted the performance into what is called at the theatre a situation of suspense. All she could do was to hold her breath. The horses with their swaying load were to get up the little bank that separated the grounds from the road. It was a thrilling moment. The preparations went on with general vociferations and some oaths, the small boys looking on from the neighbouring trees. She set her teeth and clenched her hands. A great shout went up, a whip cracked, men put their backs to the wheels, the horses plunged and reared, the load swayed, the wagon creaked, two wheels were off the ground, and amid a din of yells, it came up the bank into the enclosure and drew up at her door.

The customary way of telling such a story as this is to omit these details. But in the present case it cannot be done, because the narrator is dealing with the building of a home and not with the building of a story. Among ordinary persons like ourselves, there is a hallowed tradition that

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

three moves are as bad as a fire. Lucy had arrived at the second stage of this experience, which may be said to be—if measured by its tears—equal to an inundation. When she saw her chattels unloaded there were shattered idols.

“Oh, John, John,” she said, “you put that Japanese punch-bowl that my uncle gave me into the barrel with the smoothing irons and the jar of chow-chow. How will I ever put the pieces together?”

“And we have lost the chow-chow, I suppose,” said John.

“No,” replied Lucy, with dire resignation; “the chow-chow was all caught by mother’s picture.”

A few minutes later she called his attention to the astonishing fact that he had nailed her morocco prayer-book, with a spike through the middle of it, to the bottom or top of a packing-box.

“Moving in” brought into very clear relief the changed conditions. Physical stress accompanied everything. Chattels that in the city seemed to fit themselves easily into their places, and come noiselessly up the lift and move smoothly through doors, now stuck fast in narrow places, broke down the flooring, and looked ungainly when they were under low ceilings.

In the midst of this chaos, as they sat down to breathe, Lucy’s mind seemed to wander from the condition of the furniture to the condition of her neighbours. “What kind of people, John, have we come among? The lawyer came here for me

THE INCIPIENT GARDEN

to sign the bond while you were gone, and he talked about nothing but cats. Do you think it is safe to have an insane man attend to your legal business?"

"What, Braddock? Why, he's the only man in the village who speaks to me. He came up to me as I got off the train and told me that if I had any more strawberries than I wanted, there was a neighbouring hotel that would take them off my hands. That doesn't sound insane."

"And there's the woman next door," continued Lucy. "She came and screamed over the stone fence at me that I owed her ten cents for milk. Good gracious, I wonder what Kate would say to these people."

"Oh, that reminds me," said John. "I've a letter for you from Kate. It came to the house just as I was leaving. It's in my coat pocket. You don't want to read it now, do you?"

"Yes, I do," said Lucy, jumping about to find his coat. She sat down on a mattress and read the letter aloud. It was dated at Lakewood, N. J., and ran as follows: "My dear Lucy — I have just time to drop you a line before going out. You seem to be quite in another world from mine now, dear, and I haven't heard a word from you for weeks. What are you doing with yourself? We only stop here on our way to Cape May, for we found Narragansett Pier awfully tiresome after the first few days. I hear Cape May is awfully expensive, but I hope it isn't tiresome, for Wes really needs a change. I wish you would

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

run down there for a few days. We could have a very nice time together. You can tell John for me that I think he is real mean to keep you tied down so."

When this letter was read, Lucy and John looked at each other a moment silently, and there was a slight shadow on John's face as he waited. Finally he said, "Well, my dear?"

"We can't go down till we get the house to rights, can we, John?"

"And then?" asked John.

"Oh, then is a year off," said Lucy, looking round helplessly. "I think we've our own Cape May to look after."

All John said was, "My dear, Wesley has my sympathy — he hasn't got you."

John now gave the remainder of his vacation to the garden. In his study of it he found that Mart was a storehouse of practical knowledge without an idea beyond. The man had been employed as an under-gardener at some time, and had picked up a large fund of applicable wisdom in small matters, but as for originating or adapting, he was as helpless as the white horse.

The space ploughed and planted rather loosely for a garden was a little less than half an acre. It lay well down the slope, where there were no trees. It was growing the usual garden truck, and was badly overrun by weeds. Mart suggested that the only trouble with the soil was that it went dry in July and August, when everything burnt up. "If I was you," he said defer-

THE INCIPIENT GARDEN

entially, "I'd make a celery bed down there at the foot of the hill where it's moist."

"Oh, I guess we've everything growing here that a family needs."

Mart looked a little incredulous and superior. "As to that," he said, "I don't think it would take a premium. It hasn't got any tomato plants, egg plants, late cabbages, or cauliflower. I tried to get the old man to furnish some plants, but he wouldn't spend the money, and as for that strawberry bed, you'll have it running you out of house and home unless it's tended to. You see a garden this size ought to have a man in it all the time. You wouldn't know it if I could put in six or seven hours a day on it."

John went all over the garden carefully. (He had to pass through a strawberry bed which was nearly as large as the garden itself.) It was laid out roughly in beds containing radishes, lettuce, peas, parsley, onions, squash, spinach, beets, beans, and cucumbers—the usual supply of a country garden. Beyond were strips of sweet corn and potatoes.

"It's a shame," said Mart, "to see early potatoes eaten up before they are ripe by bugs, and onions that you can't tell from a patch of ragweed, and strawberries havin' their own way as if there wasn't a man within call. Then there's them bushes along the wall; askin' your pardon, sir, it does look pretty bad to see 'em in that shape. Why, I picked three bushels of Clark raspberries two years ago off them same

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

bushes. Now look at 'em. You won't get a bushel."

"A bushel," repeated John. "I should think that would be ample for my small family."

"Yes, sir, but they was that prime stock they ought to have been cut out and tended to. There's about a seventy-five-foot row of 'em. They might as well have gone the whole length of the wall. Eight or ten bushel is better than one, I guess."

It seemed to John that the deeper he got into his garden, the more stupendous its needs were. He had regarded it as an appanage that took care of itself with a little incidental supervision. He left it with an oppressive sense that it was a voracious monster that demanded no end of money and toil and sleepless care, and was very apt, if you took your eye off it, to relapse into a tropical and disgraceful jungle. It was very evident that a garden, even of that size, needed a gardener and a complete outfit of tools, insecticides, irrigation plant, fertilizing factory, and relays of weed destroyers. After wrestling with the problem for some time, he struck that happy line of conduct which so often distinguishes ordinary men. He took Mart into the shed adjoining the stable and let him into his confidence. The man evidently had some pride in his skill as a gardener, and had never had the full opportunity to exhibit it. John humoured him.

"Now see here, Mart," he said, "I've thought this whole matter of the garden over, and I'll tell

THE INCIPIENT GARDEN

you what I'll do. It's plain you know a good deal about the garden. I'll just turn the whole matter over to you for a month or two, and we'll see what you can do with it. You understand that I'd like to beat these people round here with a garden, don't you?"

"It wouldn't be such a hard job, sir, if I had the things to do it with."

"Very well, you get in there and give it your whole attention, and I'll make it good to you if you come out all right. All you will have to do is to take care of the horse, drive me to the depot, get the supplies, and come after me in the evening."

"You'll have to get me some tools," said Mart.

"Have you got a clear idea of what you want?"

As John took out his pad, Mart proceeded deliberately to enumerate the necessary articles, and this is the way it looked on the pad, with what Mart calculated were the prices:—

One Hand Cultivator	\$6.50
Two Hoes	1.25
One Trowel . . . . .	.25
Ten pounds of Paris Green	2.00
One large Sprinkler . . . . .	.75
One Grass Hook . . . . .	.40
One Mole Trap	1.25
One Water Barrel, Cart, and Hose	11.00
Twenty-five Tomato Plants . . . . .	.35
Twelve Egg Plants . . . . .	.25
Fifty Cabbage Plants . . . . .	.60
Twelve Pepper Plants . . . . .	.20
Twelve Cauliflower Plants . . . . .	.25
One Garden Syringe . . . . .	.50

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

One Grindstone	\$2.50
Two eighteen-inch White Pine Plank . .	4.00
Four five-inch Studding . . . . .	.50
Ten pounds Tenpenny Nails . . . . .	.35
Ten pounds Eightpenny Nails . . . . .	.40
One bundle of Shingles	1.10
Five pounds Shingle Nails . . . . .	.20

John looked the list over with amused wonder. "Aren't you running a little out of the gardening business?" he asked. "Nails and lumber and shingles are not usually included in garden supplies."

"Well, sir, I'll tell you how it is. Most of them things I ought to have, but I can get along without all of 'em. I thought that if you'd let me put up a workbench in this shed—you see I've got a few carpenter tools of my own—why, when it come to makin' a cold frame or mendin' a rake, I could have the things in good order. There's always rainy days when I could put in spare time fixin' the shingles on the stable and doin' other light jobs."

"What do you want with a water barrel?"

"Well, sir, the great trouble with a garden on a slope like this is, it's apt to go dry and burn up, and it's easier to wheel the kitchen slops down hill than to pull water up from the river, and there's nothin' better for a garden than kitchen slops. I've tried it."

"Then you've got two hoes. Wouldn't one do you?"

"I was thinkin' that my wife would lend me a

THE INCIPIENT GARDEN

hand at the weedin' when she got through her housework, and I'd like to have a spare tool for her."

"It seems to me," said John, "that your great difficulty is want of water. How would it do to run a drain-pipe from the kitchen to a cesspool on that first terrace above your beds? You could store it up there, and we could put a bit of a hose on it."

Mart's eyes brightened. "That would be a good idea, sir, but I didn't know you wanted to go to that expense."

"I don't think it will cost much more than your water cart; besides, I want to get the slops away from the house."

But John very soon found out that Mart's list did not include all the wants. They had to have a pickaxe and spade to dig the trench. Then he had to put in a pump for the cistern; then it was tile pipe and cement; then he had to get a plumber to do the fitting. Then he had to buy a hose and fittings for the cesspool tank. But it was all done in a week, and the sense of satisfaction in having accomplished it all according to plan was ample reward. Nothing that he afterwards achieved on the place gave him so much satisfaction as this little initial feat of his own engineering, and it won from Mart a succession of tributes when the summer drought came on, as we shall see.

Before John's vacation was ended he saw Mart's workbench completed, and in the rack

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

above it were the few old-fashioned tools that the man owned. In front of it stood the grindstone with a treadle affixed, of which Mart was especially proud, seeing that his tools, which were in very bad condition, and hitherto could only be sharpened by begging the favour of some one who owned a stone, and then begging some one else to turn the crank (for it is notorious that nobody ever saw a grindstone in a farmer's barn that wasn't turned by a crank) — two conditions that had left his axe, his drawknife, and his two chisels in great lack of what the critics call incisiveness.

It was impossible to watch Mart's tender admiration for that grindstone without being touched, and this led to John's buying many tools, with a vague sense that he was adding to Mart's happiness in the enlargement of his sharpening facilities.

But if John had known it, the workbench with its tools affected him in a similar way. He found himself several times during the day in the shed puttering at something. To most men of an executive turn, the possession of a workbench and tools more than renews the zest of youth. If there is any constructive skill at all in a man, the bench invites it into action, and if he is at all handy, it is the most remunerative piece of furniture he can have. The workshop speedily became a source of comfort and relief. There was some kind of wholesome delight in handling obedient material. It was astonishing how much better the kitchen shelves looked when he put

THE INCIPIENT GARDEN

them up himself, and with what pride he said to his wife, when she showed him a fractured piece of furniture, "Oh, send it down to the workshop; we'll soon put that to rights." John's nimble imagination jumped from that workshop, with its pleasant smell of shavings and row of steel implements, to the ultimate possibility of rebuilding his house from end to end.

It was not so with the garden. That luxurious patch was the most exacting and baffling element of his new life for two months. The deeper he became entangled in its meshes, the more imperative were its wants and the more insuperable its difficulties. He saw the tomato and cabbage plants set out, and believed the work was done. But he soon found out that it required the incessant care of Mart and himself to preserve them from the cut-worms, the moles, and the weeds.

There was one onion bed thirty-five feet long that expanded his knowledge of practical gardening more than anything else. It required the attention of three able-bodied persons to keep it visible to the eye. Mart and Tilka and John worked at it with heroic persistence to get the weeds out, and it baffled them. By no system of calculation could he figure out that the crop at its best would pay for the labour expended on it. He got up at four o'clock and found Mart and Tilka down on their knees already pulling out a fresh crop of weeds. As near as he could estimate with his pad each onion would cost in foot-pounds of labour about twenty-five cents, and he

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

could buy onions at the store for twenty cents a peck. His peppers, which had taken root finely and looked prosperous, he found one morning had been overturned by a mole, and most of them were lying flat and wilted in the sun. In order to have any potatoes, he and Mart had to work assiduously with Paris green, until they were covered with the dust, and the garden looked like a pattern of cheap wall paper. On another occasion the horse got loose and tramped down his lettuce and peas with a placid anarchism, and John began to have grave doubts of the utility of gardens anyway. There were other forms of energy, the relation of which to results was more easily computable.

But Mart did not appear to understand the cause of the discouragement, and listened to John's cynical remarks about the garden with a quiet belief that they were an amateur's allowable ignorance.

Every amateur gardener has to go through this phase of doubt, just as does the theological student. There is a time when final causes and onions appear to be a delusion and a snare, and raising truck takes its place alongside the attempt to square the circle. But if the student in the higher criticism or the lower vegetables remains a student long enough, some liberating light falls across his disbelief and his other truck beds, especially when he has some orthodox old hand near by who has been through it all.

"I have come to the conclusion," said John to

THE INCIPIENT GARDEN

Mart, who was still pulling weeds out of the onions, "that a garden is a very nice plaything for a capitalist, but I shall turn my attention to grass and flowers."

Mart stood up and wiped the sweat from his face with his shirt-sleeve. "Do you mean lawns?" he asked.

"Yes. A fine stretch of lawn, well-kept and green, is a special hobby of mine."

"Then all I've got to say, sir," replied Mart, "is that you've come to the wrong place. I never saw a real lawn in Rockland County. We have grass plots up here — but lawns? — well, sir, it'll cost you about four times as much as a garden."

This was not encouraging, but John was incredulous. "You don't have to weed a lawn like onions," he said. "It takes care of itself."

Mart laughed. "I'd rather take care of an acre of onions than half an acre of lawns," he said. "In the first place, this soil is too dry for lawns. You'll have to have water works first, and then it's got to be cut every other day and kept wet. So between the cutter and the hose, a man wouldn't have time for much else, and when you come to keep it well rolled and dig the moles out, it's about all a man wants to do."

Now a lawn had always been one of John's dreams, and to have it dispelled in this manner was not at all consonant with his make-up.

"I'll show you," he said, "that you are wrong. Any crop that takes all a man's time to keep the

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

weeds out makes life a burden and onions an impertinence."

"Lord bless you, sir," replied Mart, "the onions are all right. They were planted wrong — that's all. Next year, if I'm alive, I'll lay your garden out on a field plan, in proper rows so as I can run a horse cultivator through it, and there won't be any trouble about weeds; but I couldn't undertake to keep an acre of lawn wet on top of a hill in July, unless you gave me an English climate, or put a ram down in that stream, built a water tank in front of the house, and laid a thousand feet of pipe in. Even then, I guess this soil would suck up more water than you could supply. I estimate that ten square feet of grass will drink more water than forty camels."

With a vague suspicion that Mart was simply prejudiced against lawns, John went to work to read up on the subject, and to examine the neighbouring grass plots, and the deeper he got into the subject, the more respect he had for Mart's sagacity. He took several long walks in search of lawns, and failed to discover the ideal thing. He plunged into the lawn maker's manual, and came plump upon the fundamental requirement of water and a retentive soil. Then he plunged from the water into the soil, so to speak, not having a frying pan and fire handy, and got himself bewildered with sandy loams and cold substrata. He read hydraulics when his wife was asleep, and pumped his brain full of water rams, Ryder pumps, windmills, and pressure to the square inch. To relin-

THE INCIPIENT GARDEN

quish his lawn was like giving up a creed. But when he studied his resources, it looked very much as if it must go the way of the garden. It was not till several weeks had passed that light broke in on these problems and Hope reset her bow of promise above his truck beds.

His vacation drew to a close, and late one Saturday afternoon he came into the house wearing a moody countenance, as if he had not quite disentangled himself from the lawn problem. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and he threw his straw hat into a corner of the sitting room, and sat down with a sigh of relief in an easy chair, stretching his legs out in front of him. His wife was sitting at her cottage piano, idly running her fingers over the keys. A rosy light from the window fell across her white dress, giving it a creamy hue and touching her cheek with a mellow ripeness. The room looked surprisingly cosey and comfortable. Her little secretary stood in a corner with her letters and bills tumbled about on it, and near by was a bouquet of wild azaleas and sweet alyssum. A few light shadows danced across his picture on the wall, and a suffused pearly light seemed to be part of the pianissimo that dripped from her fingers. He could hear the occasional shouts outside as his boy romped under the trees with Tilka. In the lapses of the music he took it all in, and then said, as if to himself, "Well, after all, it is for this that we toil and spin."

His wife swung herself round on the piano-stool leisurely. He noticed that she had dressed

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

her hair with unusual care and wore a tea rose on her breast. "Dear me," he said, "you must be expecting company."

"No," she said; "I was — but the company has come."

He thought that was very pretty. It sounded as if she had continued the pianissimo of the instrument with her mouth.

"Thank you, my dear, it's awfully good and refreshing of you. You've lost all desire to go to Cape May, haven't you?"

"I should cut a pretty figure at Cape May," she replied, "among those women who have handsome husbands who never take their dress coats off except to play golf. What should I do with a husband in a blue shirt and his finger tied up in a rag?"

"I cut myself with a jack-plane," said John, apologetically. "I never heard you acknowledge before that your husband was not as handsome as Wesley."

"It never occurred to you, did it, that I married you because you were handsome?"

"It never occurred to me how you came to do it at all. I've been dying to know all these years."

"I did it because you were not handsome, you great goose. Where would I have been if you were as good-looking as Wes? You must see that I would have been dragged down to the level of Cape May sooner or later."

"Yes, and I wonder where I would have landed."

THE INCIPIENT GARDEN

"Cape May, too. A man always drags a woman down to his own level."

To have one's wife play the coquette suddenly and daintily in a white dress with a tea rose on her bosom, is one of those little luxuries that ordinary men appreciate.

"Let us go out under the trees," he said. "To-morrow will be Sunday, and the last day of my vacation."

He put his arm about her gallantly, and they went out together. Tilka, who watched them at some distance, said to herself, "They think so much of each other, as if they were not married so long as three years," and then she slipped into the kitchen.

When they sat down under the trees, John said he was a little worried about that garden.

"Yes," said Lucy, promptly, "it has been worrying me, too — almost to death."

"Then you can sympathize with me," said John. "I was going to propose to you that we abolish it altogether — it's too great a strain."

"Abolish the garden?" cried Lucy, with astonishment.

"Yes. It's not a mathematical proposition, and I can't work it out."

"But it's an awful convenience."

"Then I don't see why it should worry *you*," said John.

"It worries me because I do not know what to do with the stuff. I wish you would go into that kitchen — it looks like a greengrocer's. I'm

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

getting to feel that it would be a luxury to go out and buy something. I wish mother had some of those heads of lettuce that are going to waste. She is so fond of lettuce, and so particular about it. You know, John, you always said she made the best salads you ever ate. What do you suppose Tilka said to me this morning—and the poor girl does her very best to eat all the stuff that's brought in—she said, 'I think when you have a garden, you should a pig get. If you do not much care for the smell, I could keep him in the cellar. It is that wicked to throw away such good greens.'"

Then John and Lucy fell to laughing. "I suppose," said he, "that she would feed the pig on strawberries if she had him in the cellar. I wonder what kind of a flavour pork would have if it were fed on strawberries. It sounds rather dainty."

"But, John, the strawberries must be fed to something—they are spoiling on our hands. Mart has been taking away ten quarts every morning, thanks to your cat-lawyer, and says he could take more if he had some one to help him pick."

"Yes, I know," remarked John; "but they'll all give out in another week, and that will be the end of the garden. I'll turn it into a lawn next year."

"If you do I'll go to Cape May. You had better let me undertake the mathematics of the garden. It's quite beyond a man's comprehension of details."

THE INCIPIENT GARDEN

"Oh, I have been studying the books on gardening, my dear. It's all a question of water."

"And I've been studying the garden itself. Just as soon as the strawberries give out, there will be cherries, currants, and raspberries, and when they give out, there will be blackberries, and Mart says that the Sanitarium will take all that we can spare. If you're going to give the rest of your life to lawns, I will look after the garden, and I will promise you that it will not be abolished. Gracious, what would country life be without a garden? It's the old story of home without a mother — and speaking of mother, John ——"

"Yes, but Mart says the whole thing will burn up in July. I've studied this thing, my dear, and it all resolves itself into a question of water."

"That depends on whether Mart does the talking. He's about the driest gardener I ever met. Let me tell you something. The man who owns the Sanitarium is running up a little bill for our berries, and I suppose he would rather make a trade than pay cash, like all these people, for he spoke to Mart the other morning, and wanted to know if we needed a phaeton. He said he had one in his barn, a little old-fashioned, but perfectly sound, that he bought for his wife, and she died. It's too heavy for his pony. He told Mart that we could have it at our own price, and said he would send it up and let us try it. You know, John, you'll be away a great deal, and I don't want to be shut up in the house all

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

the time. Besides — if mother should come up — ”

“Then we'll want a new harness, my dear.”

Lucy looked at John tenderly a moment and then said: “John, how much does a new harness cost? I might earn the money helping Mart pick the berries.”

“You will not have to,” said John, quite magisterially. “What's that?”

“That? Why, that's the supper bell. Doesn't it sound nice?”

“Supper bell? Why, where did you get that?”

“Mother gave it to me long ago, but I never had a chance to use it till now.”

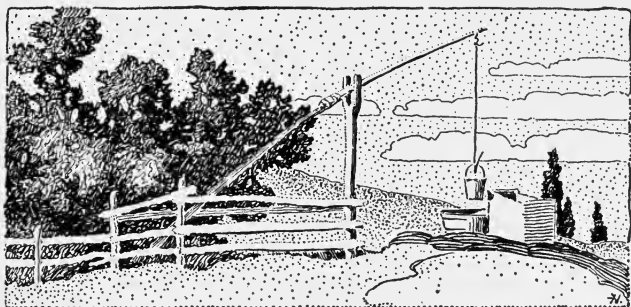
“I think you were going to say something about mother, were you not?” remarked John, casually.

Lucy looked very demure as she got up. But she merely said, “I don't think I need to mention it, John, do you?”

And John, trying to look demure himself, said, “No, I don't think it's necessary. It's all right.”

Then they went in to supper.





CHAPTER VI

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

JOHN had been guided in his selection of a site by an architectural book that had commended the brow of a hill with great enthusiasm, because it was dry and healthy and always had a current of fresh air. Now that he found himself on the brow of a hill, the dryness of the site began to worry him. There was plenty of water at the foot of the hill, but it would not run up, and that which fell at the top had a lively haste to run down. He had already learned that one cannot have lawns without water, and that the gardens in the neighbourhood, especially on a slope, were apt to burn up. It was becoming very plain to him that his landscape gardening was a much bigger problem than he had dreamed of, and his vernal prospects of an embowered and verdant villa were beginning to assume some of the sere and yellow aspects of the country about him.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

One Sunday morning Mr. Swarthout came in upon him contemplating his scraggly grass-plot rather ruefully.

"You don't keep it cut close enough," said Mr. Swarthout.

"Don't I?" responded John. "Look over there along the fence. I've blistered my hands shaving it down to the roots, but it is just as yellow and scrawny as ever. What the place wants, Mr. Swarthout, is water."

"Gits as much water as any o' the places, don't it?"

"Yes, that's the trouble — it wants more than the other places to suit me."

"Seems to me it looks all right for the season. Hes all the water natur' allows it, don't it?"

Just then Mr. Braddock drove up and entered the grounds, carrying a large cat in his arms and smiling benignantly as he stroked it.

"We call her Medusa," said Mr. Braddock, lifting the long hair of the cat's head between his thumb and finger. "You know the myth. There is a singular relation between the length of a cat's hair and its animal food. You will have to feed her on meat occasionally."

Mr. Swarthout walked a step or two away with indifferent contempt. Then he turned and said, "You don't see anything the matter with this 'ere grass, do you, Mr. Braddock?"

Mr. Braddock stroked the cat and smiled as he replied: —

"Going to make lawns, eh? I see. We all

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

go through it. That's why I brought you a cat. It's always well to begin lawns with a cat. Moles, you know — they plough them up faster than you can roll them down. Nothing like a cat for moles. Just feel that hair. Mole diet."

"Mr. Dennison has got a notion that God Almighty don't know how much water's wanted on this land," said Mr. Swarthout, "and he's thinkin' about regulatin' it."

"Ah," remarked Mr. Braddock, suppressing with the back of his hand an inclination to guffaw, "what you're thinking about is an artesian well. We have to go through that, too, when we improve. Mine cost me — let me see — 2.50 a foot. You've heard of speculators in the city watering their stock" — and he chuckled as he said it — "well, sir, when we speculate in the country we begin by watering the soil. There isn't much difference."

"How many feet is your artesian well?" asked John.

Mr. Braddock thought a moment, stroked his cat, and replied:—

"One hundred or thereabout, and the windmill — let me see — that cost me seventy-five dollars, I think."

"Three hundred and twenty-five dollars for a well," said John, contemplatively. "But you have plenty of water, at all events?"

"Water?" said Mr. Braddock. "Certainly not. Water doesn't follow by any means — never does, I assure you, unless you go a thousand feet.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

But the windmill is quite an ornament when there is a gale. After artesiains we always try water-rams. They are less expensive. Think of trying artesiains?"

"It's dead agin' Providence," said Mr. Swarthout. "I've been here sixty year, and I never had nothin' but a good curb well with a windlass, and there's never been any trouble on my place about water, 'cepting there's a long drought, and then I guess we ain't no worse off than other people."

Mr. Braddock pressed his hand over his mouth a moment. "I'll just take Medusa in to Mrs. Dennison," he said, "and tell her about the moles." Then he remembered something. "There's an auction up at Sneider's next week. You might pick up a second-hand ram there, if you don't go in for artesiains." And he went off to the house with what to John was very much like a suppressed chuckle.

This conversation left John Dennison sorely perplexed about the water problem. Mart insisted that it was a waste of time to think about having an English lawn. It would ruin any man who was not a millionaire, for the soil wasn't "kalkilated" for it.

Finally John put ten pounds of earth from his hill-top into a box and sent it by express to an agricultural chemist whom he had known in school days, and with it a request that he would tell him what the soil needed to make it retain its moisture so that grass would grow luxuriously upon

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

it. The letter he received in reply was as follows:—

“MY DEAR OLD FRIEND: I was delighted to hear from you once more, and surprised to learn that you have gone to Rockland County to live. I turned your box of soil into my back garden without examining it, for that was not necessary when I knew where you were and read your description of the site. I have lived in that vicinity myself. The trouble with lawns up there is this: on most of the uplands and slopes there is a thin alluvium, or detritus, on a crust of friable and porous red sandstone that takes water like a sponge. The soil is comminuted red-rock with vegetable mould, and there is little or no hydrous aluminum silicate (common clay) in it. If you will take a small piece of ground and treat it with blue clay (you can get plenty of it at the Haverstraw brickyards), you will find that it will stop the pores of the rock and your subsoil will retain the moisture, so that instead of erecting a tank you can convert the soil itself into a tank. Let me know the result of the experiment. Etc., etc.”

Lucy met John at the depot a day or two later, in her phaeton. He saw her from the car window before the train stopped. She had driven fearlessly in among the fine equipages, and both she and the white horse looked as independent as any of them. He thought she might have kept a little in the rear with her humble turnout, but she

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

was the first one in the line, and the old white horse really seemed to be trying to hold his head high and paw the earth with a sudden sense of *éclat*.

As John climbed into the phaeton, Lucy said, "You look as serious as if you were going to a funeral; what is on your mind now?"

"Hydrous aluminum silicate," said John, with grave deliberation. "It's a terrible responsibility. Let me get this bundle under the seat — it's lawn seed."

"There was a box came for you to-day from Haverstraw. I asked Mart what it was, and he said, 'Jedging from the heft of it, it must be gold.'"

"Ha, ha!" said John, "it's hydrous aluminum silicate."

"Mercy," ejaculated Lucy. "Is it explosive?"

"No," said John, "it's blue clay. I am going to make a little experiment. It wouldn't interest you."

"Oh, it's a secret!"

"Yes, one of those secrets that tremble on a man's lips, unuttered, till he gets the hang of it himself. I see Sneider's auction is posted in the depot. I want you to drive up there, my dear, and see if you can pick me up a stone-boat."

"A stone *boat*?"

"No, not a stone *boat*, but a *stone-boat*."

"I never heard of such a thing. Are you going to put your hydrous what-do-you-call-it in it?"

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

"Well, there's a close connection — it's part of the secret."

"What do you suppose the Sneiders are selling out for? Are they bankrupt? Heavens, perhaps they've been trying to make lawns."

Then John laughed. "It seems to be the custom up here," he said, "whenever the old folks die, for the young ones to sell out. As the Sneiders are old Revolutionary stock, and their home is a hundred and fifty years old, there must be a lot of venerable truck there. You had better take some money with you."

For days after this Lucy watched John out of the corner of her eye without disturbing him with any questions. She saw him digging holes in all directions on the grounds, piling up red dirt and pulling out chunks of red stone. She noticed that he had laid out a little space ten feet square, that looked like a new cemetery lot, and watched it morning and evening with mysterious care. He had dug out the soil, refilled the space with clay and loam and stable manure, seeded it down carefully, and not having a roller, had smoothed it with a board upon which she saw him, from her window, dancing what she supposed to be an idiotic jig that called for some reproof.

"John," she said, "why don't you exercise in the barn and get a sand-bag? It would be much more becoming than trying to dance in the front yard where everybody can see you, for you never were a good dancer."

John laughed heartily. "Dance!" he said;

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"I am going to make that whole front space dance with God's own green gladness. You wait. I'll make our place look, among these country deserts, like an emerald set among a lot of yellow rhinestones. Don't you forget the stone-boat."

A day or two later, Lucy took Mart with her and drove up the road to the Sneider auction. It was her first experience with a country vendue, and was full of homely interest. All the near neighbours had gathered with their vehicles, and most of them were wandering about the grounds and house with a dull curiosity. No sooner had Mart tied the horse and Lucy had entered the grounds, than she was accosted by a young woman whose youth and dress were in startling contrast to the homely and careless rusticity of the people about her.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Dennison," she said, "but I am so glad you came. I am May Braddock. Pa has told me all about you. Pa is peculiar, you know. How is Medusa? I ought to have called on you before. Pa doesn't give cats to everybody. I suppose you've noticed that he is peculiar?"

Lucy nodded as if she conceded that fact without the use of words.

"Yes, Pa told me that your husband was going to make lawns — isn't it sad?"

"I don't see anything sad about it," said Lucy. "It's part of the improvements."

"And so it is true that you are really going to

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

improve. I was in hopes that it was idle gossip. I wish you would let me come and talk you out of it. You see there are so few city folk come up here that stay—they always begin to improve and then go away.”

Lucy laughed. “If my husband goes too far, perhaps I’ll avail myself of your eloquence. As he has only reached the lawn stage, perhaps I can manage him alone.”

“And do you care for old things?”

“Do you mean in husbands?”

“No,” said Miss Braddock, with unperturbed seriousness; “I mean in auctions.”

“I have never been to an auction before in my life,” replied Lucy. “Is it confined to old things?”

“Entirely,” said Miss Braddock, lowering her voice. “Just look about you. I am the only young thing you will ever see at the auctions up here. That is why I am so glad you came.”

“I suppose they all expect to pick up something new.”

“Oh, dear, no. The same things at all the auctions. They pass ’round the country in that way. New things wouldn’t stand it. I’ve got an itinerary of the Felter candlesticks ever since the first auction in the De Ronde homestead. They’ve got around here at last, and I’m going to try and get them. You didn’t come for the candlesticks, did you?”

“No,” replied Lucy. “I’m after a boat.”

“A boat,” repeated her companion. “I didn’t

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

notice any boat on the list. What kind of a boat? Is it china?"

"No," said Lucy. "It's stone."

"Then come right in and we'll look at the crockery before Pa begins selling. I suppose it's a butter-boat."

May Braddock, straight, lithe, and trim, had a mature vivacity in singular contrast with the stolid complacency of the country folk about her. She had graduated at a Normal School, and there was something in her gray eyes and the gold spectacles that covered them that suggested a gentle superiority of acquirement.

"There's Pa now," she said, as they entered the house. "He's talking to Pop Swarthout. I'll ask him where the candlesticks are."

"Good morning, Mrs. Dennison," said the lawyer, who was the centre of a group of rustics. "How are the birds?"

Lucy, who from the first had been inclined to look upon Mr. Braddock as slightly demented and dangerously irrelevant, stared at his daughter for an explanation.

"I refer to the cat, Medusa," the lawyer said. "You know I told you she would exterminate the moles, but I fear I neglected to tell you that she will exterminate the birds as well." And then he put the back of his hand to his mouth, as if suppressing a practical joke.

"Pa," said Miss Braddock, with the slightest iciness of tone, "where have you put the brass candlesticks?"

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

"Doubtless they are in the parlour lot." And looking at Mrs. Dennison, he added, "My daughter is an antiquarian, you know."

"Antiquary, Pa," said Miss Braddock, turning away.

"Quite right, quite right, my dear," said her father. "We are all antiquaries on these occasions, Mrs. Dennison. Did you find the cat take kindly to her new home?"

"Oh, the cat is all right, Mr. Braddock," said Lucy. "Where have you got the boat?"

This piece of irrelevancy on the part of Lucy appeared to be so much in his own line that he leaned toward her with an extra air of benignity, and said, "Exactly — the boat — is there a boat on the schedule?"

"Yes, in the stone-ware, Pa," said Miss Braddock, correctively.

"Precisely," replied the lawyer. "It is undoubtedly moored in the china closet in the kitchen."

"And the windlass bed, Pa; is that to be put up to-day — the bed that George Washington slept on?" Mr. Braddock looked at the schedule. "One bundle bedposts, mahogany, with slats and bed wrench. Garret."

"That's it," broke in Pop Swarthout. "I helped tie it up when Molly Concklin sold out in '58 and Job Felter bought it in. It hain't been sot up since, but I guess some of the slats was burnt when the Felters sold out in '64. I allers said George must hev had chilblains on his back if he slept on them sticks."

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"There's no atmosphere about these people," said May Braddock, as she pulled Lucy away. "That historic bedstead will be stowed away in some other garret for a generation, unless I can rescue it to-day."

Just then Mart came in and informed Lucy that he had found the boat. It was in the stable — would she like to take a look at it? — and as Mr. Braddock's auctioneer-voice was beginning to sound, she left Miss Braddock and went with Mart to the carriage-house. As she followed him with her skirts lifted, she saw a number of men standing around in various attitudes and groups of indifferent patience, much as if they were at a funeral. They were waiting for the sale to reach the live-stock and farm implements, to which alone the masculine interest attached.

Mart made his way through barrels and bran and lumber and rubbish to a pile of débris in the carriage-house, moving old shafts and broken wheelbarrows and stovepipe, occasionally remarking as he did so: "Look out for the wagon grease, mum," or "Mind the barbed wire, mum," and pointed to an old and worn board with a ring-bolt in it and well smeared with yellow, dried mud. It stood on end against the siding. "There you are, mum, and a good one it is, too."

"What?" asked Lucy.

"The stun-boat."

"That old board? Why, it's all frayed out on the edges and in a filthy condition. I'm not going to spend John's money on such rubbish."

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

Standing close beside it was an enormous and rickety old pine bureau with five awry drawers. It was stained or painted with yellow ochre, had shrunk at the seams, and had lost most of its knobs. It seemed to fascinate Mart. He pulled the drawers out with delight and herculean effort, so that he had to kick them back with his boot. It had evidently been sent to the barn for kindling-wood. As Lucy expressed a strong desire to get out of the dreadful place, Mart opened the way for her again, looking back longingly at the old bureau and remarking as they went along: "Take care of the hole in the floor, mum," and "Look out for the tar, mum."

When she reached the house again the auction sale had brought everybody into the kitchen, and she heard Mr. Braddock's voice saying: "Now, then, what am I bid for the dinner service — soup plates, cups, cups and saucers, etc., and three old blue platters — what am I offered for the lot?"

"Thirty cents," said Mrs. Swarthout, promptly.

"Fifty," said Miss Braddock, looking at Mrs. Swarthout as if that lady ought to go to the foot of the class.

"I am offered fifty cents," smiled the auctioneer. "As you are practical people and these things were made for service, I trust that you will save them from going to the Braddock *mu-se-um*."

"*Mu-se-um*, Pa," said Miss Braddock.

Lucy had scarcely reached her phaeton when May Braddock came after her. "Must you go,

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

dear?" she said. "I hope we shall know each other better. I've got the platters."

"So glad," said Lucy; "but, dear, what makes you correct your father's pronunciation in public? It's so odd, don't you know."

"Oh, he prefers it, and taught me to do it. He mispronounces purposely so as to trot out my education. You know, I told you he was peculiar."

When John came home he was regaled with a most amusing account of the auction, but when he asked for the stone-boat his wife informed him that the old board was too entirely ridiculous and that she didn't buy the rubbish. But Mart told him, when they were in the workshop, that *he* had bought it quietly and was going up with the wagon to fetch it. Not long after this Lucy saw him drive in, and the most conspicuous object in the wagon was the old yellow bureau, with the stone-boat leaning against it. Such stubborn infatuation on the part of the men piqued her a little, and when she saw John sliding about the grounds on that absurd board, driving the white horse with exaggerated delight, while Mart walked beside him and shared the responsibility, her anxiety for her husband's mental equilibrium increased. Nor were his explanations at all soothing. "My dear," he would say, "the basis of all improvements in this country is the stone-boat. With that everything is possible. You wait. Get up, there; whoa. Get up." And John went sliding off across the grass, leaving a wake of crushed sod behind him.

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

"I do believe," she said, as he came back shoutingly, with Mart beside him, "that you will want me next to drive the dreadful thing to the depot for you."

"Well, if you do," said John, "you'll be sure to be in the first rank with it, ahead of everybody else."

Lucy's emotion and perplexity were expressed in one sentence. She involuntarily clasped her hands and exclaimed, "What *are* you going to do, John?"

And John, looking admiringly after the stone-boat that, under Mart's guidance, was sliding back to the barn, replied:—

"You just wait."

It is no disparagement of Lucy's discernment to say that she could not look through all the coarse and dirty preparations to the idea which was in John's mind. Entitled to respect (as she undoubtedly was) for being an exemplary, ordinary person, and in that regard quite the equal of her excellent husband, she was, nevertheless, a woman, and somewhat inclined, as all women are, to jump to ideal conclusions and not wade through red mud to their accomplishment.

There was a month of devastating "ruction" that came perilously near to bringing on a matrimonial separation, and Lucy always attributed what she called her misfortune to that stone-boat. She may not have said so, but in her secret heart she dated many of her discomforts from the arrival of that accursed utensil. Nor were any efforts of

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

John's logic capable of removing her antipathy to it. He tried to explain to her that in a country of many stones it would be impossible to move them by lifting them into a wagon and out again. But they could be rolled easily upon a flat stone-boat and pulled anywhere. To which Lucy invariably replied: "But why move them at all?" Upon which John fell into his usual complacency and said: "You just wait."

She saw with unconcealed consternation that John had hired a labourer who was digging an unsightly trench across the entire front of the property and piling up a long mound of red dirt. One or two rough planks were laid across at the gate, for the women to walk upon. It was no relief to be told by John that the red dirt would make the finest kind of a walk when it got hard, and she saw that he was piling it up in mounds along the only available path they had. Nor was that the limit of John's irrepressible dementia—he was pulling the stones out of the great wall and heaping them up parallel to his trench, and look out when she would, Lucy was sure to see Mart sliding across the grounds on the stone-boat and wearing the grass into smooth and ghastly wakes. She had resolved to ask no more questions, and tried to assume a superior indifference, as when one condones a failing with affection. But when she saw an enormous hole, thirty feet long and twelve feet wide, opening at the north of the house, and men with picks and shovels heaping up another pyramid of red soil, she went off to

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

Miss Braddock and began to form an entirely new intimacy of condolence with that lively and spectacled antiquary, who opened her heart to her and told her of all the fresh auctions in the county, and took her off on long excursions in her basket-phaeton.

One Sunday morning, as John and his wife were eating their breakfast with a great deal more luxury and happiness than they seemed to be aware of, a tremendous summer shower came up, and John and Mart rushed out to keep the water from pouring into their big hole. In less than five minutes Mart was driving the white horse, with the stone-boat, through the summer storm to the rescue. Lucy and Harold stood at the south window, a little tremulously, and watched the water come down in pelting sheets, and listened to the peals of thunder rolling off in the Ramapo Mountains. But while they stood there the storm subsided as quickly as it came. The yellow sun shone out, making everything glisten and flash, and the birds began to rejoice from all the trees and shrubs. Lucy caught Harold by the hand and sallied out to see if her flowers had been uprooted by the deluge. Coming around in the narrow path at the south of the house to the front grounds, she saw John and Mart standing there in attitudes of imbecile dismay, and the white horse, still dripping with water, was patiently waiting to see what would next occur. John pointed, without saying anything, to the path that led to the gate, and one glance told Lucy

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

what had happened. The mounds of red dirt had been beaten down and liquefied into rivers of chocolate that inundated everything. A miry slough extended from the house to the gate, and on either side the worn tracks of the stone-boat glimmered now with red puddles. The whole aspect of the place was enough to make a tidy woman heartsick.

But before she could arrange that feminine privilege, a vehicle drove up in the road before the gate, the driver jumped down and assisted an old lady across the planks to the entrance-way, and Lucy, with a genuine burst of tenderness and consternation, cried: —

“Heavens — mother!”

For a moment there was a speechless tableau. The old lady at the gate was staring about her with that soft and submissive expression that Lucy had often seen before upon her dear old face when she was singing: —

“On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wistful eye.”

John had his rubber boots on, and calling out lustily: “Hold on a minute, madam,” began to wade to the gate with a proper sense of the crisis. He succeeded in reaching the old lady and her bundles, and was seen making violent, apologetic gestures. A moment later he called out to Mart: “Fetch the stone-boat, old man.” Mart grasped the situation in an instant. He rushed into the house, brought out a kitchen chair, placed

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

it on the stone-boat, and then getting aboard himself, slid off to the rescue. Then it was that the old lady, with some persuasion, was induced to mount the extraordinary vehicle, and with her feet drawn up on the rungs of the chair, and her skirts well gathered about her ankles, she came smoothly up the path as softly as the approach of twilight, John and Mart on either side ploughing through the mud with the conscious pride of a guard of honour. Meanwhile Lucy, between hysterical laughter and tears, was protesting and explaining. "You see, ma, it's the improvements. John could just as well have hitched up the phaeton, but he is so self-willed. Do come in, and we will see if we can find a place where there isn't any red mud."

As the door closed on this incident, the driver in the road, who had been standing on his box watching the operation, suddenly whipped up his horses and went furiously off, as if anxious to get to the depot while it was all fresh in his mind, and once there doubtless told, with such a fellow's disregard of accuracy, how they "slid her up and backed her in."

Such episodes, it may be remarked, never come singly, and in this respect they are akin to misfortunes. Scarcely had the mother and her bundles been safely housed than another vehicle drove up. This time it was a buggy, much mud-bespattered, and the driver waved a piece of paper in the air without attempting to come in. When Mart obtained it, what was John's aston-

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

ishment to find that it was a telegram which read as follows : —

“JOHN DENNISON :

“Meet us at the 9.40 train. Invitation accepted. Have brought friend. HOLCOMB.”

John looked at the announcement with stupid amazement. His mind travelled back to that morning on the ferryboat when he had met Holcomb, and, as a country gentleman, triumphed over him and shot vague invitations at him. That piece of insensate folly had now come home to roost, bringing a friend with it.

“Nine-forty,” he said. “It is now a quarter past ten.”

Telegrams in the country are not delivered promptly. The visitors must have come on the same train with the mother, and would be along presently.

With the profound sense of the ordinary man, which in John so often took the place of genius, he set his teeth and braced himself to the situation. With the telegram in his hand he announced to his wife, who was already showing the house to her mother, that “more company was coming.”

To his astonishment this information, which he tried his utmost to impart with an air of good nature, went off in the wrong direction.

“More company, John? I hope you do not consider mother company.”

This was so crass and unwarranted an interpre-

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

tation that John gave way to annoyance. "I am not considering mother at all," he said.

Lucy gave a little gasp that ran into something like a sob.

"Of course, you're not considering mother — you're just acting like a brute."

And mother, with supreme indifference, remarked: "Oh, don't consider me. I didn't expect any consideration when I came."

This speech and the crushed air of injured innocence in both women threatened to break the back of the ordinary man. He threw the telegram down a little defiantly, saying: —

"It's your friend Holcomb, not mine. And he's brought some other friend of yours with him. They will probably stay a month. There, I hear them shouting for you now."

Then he strode out.

As he reached the back porch, torn with many conflicting emotions, he came upon Medusa, fat, sleek, and unperturbed, lying in the sun. She looked at him with calm contempt. Some feathers of a young oriole that she had just eaten were fluttering about.

John did something which was certainly without excuse and quite beneath the dignity of an ordinary man.

He kicked Medusa violently with his rubber boot.



CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH JOHN ENTERTAINS ANGELS UNAWARES

THE arrival of visitors at this time was painfully inopportune, but it had to be faced manfully, if not hospitably. John made his way to the front gate once more, and Holcomb, who was climbing out of the vehicle, greeted him familiarly :—

“Nice chap you are to meet your friends at the depot. Didn’t you get my telegram?”

“Certainly,” said John. “But you didn’t get mine, telling you not to come — all upside down — impossible to entertain —”

“No — didn’t get it,” said Holcomb, lifting out his traps. “Can’t be helped now. This is Sprague. Sprague — Dennison. Dennison — Sprague. Can’t we drive in somewhere?”

“No,” said John, “got everything laid down in red cement, and it isn’t dry. I think you will have to go round.”

ENTERTAINS ANGELS UNAWARES

"All right," responded Holcomb, who was evidently not to be deterred. "Sprague has got light woollens on. Red cement is indelible, isn't it? How do we go round?"

"Drive up the road a little, get over the stone fence, come down that field, and cross the other fence into my back ground."

"Good enough," responded the cheery Holcomb. "Say, do you know that's a fine effect of colour where the red cement has run down the bank? Looks as if your improvements had cut their throat. Ha, ha!"

Nothing daunted, the guests climbed the adjoining fences and came in at the rear. Sprague, in light flannels, wearing tan-coloured gloves and shoes and carrying a cane, evinced a weary humour at the proceedings, but Holcomb insisted with much eagerness that the irregular and unconventional thing was just what they were looking for. "Sprague, there, he's so infernally lazy, it will do him good to see something practical going on," he said.

"But of all people in the world," exclaimed Lucy, a little flushed with excitement, "what-ever put it in your head to come up here?"

"Dennison," replied Holcomb promptly. "'Come up,' says he, 'to my country place and stay a month. It will freshen you up.' Sprague needs freshening, so I brought him along. Don't make any apologies."

"To tell the truth —" began John, apologetically.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

Holcomb held up his hands. "Don't," he said. "No family truths. If there is anything Sprague dislikes, it is the truth. I can sleep in the coach-house with the groom. But, say, this is pastoral," and he took a survey of the landscape.

Sprague pulled his light mustache, blushed slightly, and said: "I fear we are intruding."

And such is the inbred cowardice of politeness and the force of a hospitable instinct that Lucy said: "Oh, no, certainly not," and John remarked: "Don't mention it," and even the mother, who shared the general duty of deception, tried to look as if the place had only needed Sprague to be perfect.

When John got them alone he tried to explain. "I'll have to ask you to rough it," he said. "We intend to enlarge the house later on, but at present we are a little cramped. You'll not mind bunking in anyhow?"

Then, for fear Tilka would strike, he caught that stalwart maid-servant and whispered in an aside to her as he slipped a bank-note into her hand: "They will not stay long—do the best you can." And Tilka, bridling a little at the bribery, said: "I guess I can so well do my work as if you do not haf to pay me all ofer again." Then she put the money in her bosom, and rushed at the stove with an Alpine war-cry that was meant for a yodel.

Notwithstanding the domestic annoyance to which the household was at first subjected by

ENTERTAINS ANGELS UNAWARES

these unexpected visitors, the visitors, nevertheless, fitted themselves somehow into the situation of affairs with Bohemian ease and added a pleasant element to the atmosphere of drudgery brought about by John's inhuman improvements. Holcomb laughed at discomforts, slept on the floor in the garret, talked art wildly and aimlessly, sang songs of his own composing, picked raspberries like a hired man, and ate everything that was placed before him. He was in temperament as well as in appetite an exhilarating vacuum, with a joyous contempt for anything that was serious. As for Sprague, he was an interesting mystery. There was something about his slim figure, and especially about his pale face that flushed at the slightest provocation—a suggestion of delicacy—that piqued curiosity without ever gratifying it. His reticence appeared to be a sort of exhaustion, as if long association with Holcomb had worn him out.

When John went away to the city and left these two men on the place, he had some misgivings. They would add to Lucy's worry and work, and be very much in the way of the necessary and dirty drudgery of getting the place to rights. But when he came back at night, Lucy told him that his visitors had been off all day—she had seen nothing of them, and it was not till dinner-time that they came back, tired out. But after dinner, when the household assembled under the cedars, the guests contributed an ele-

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

ment of pleasantry that was much needed. Lucy had sent word to May Braddock: "We've got a real live artist here from the city. At least he says he is an artist, but I can hardly believe it, for he blushes at the slightest glance. Come up and watch him."

The invitation was promptly accepted, and May Braddock drove up in her basket-phaeton and joined the party under the trees. Then for the first time, the anxieties and discomforts of the new home were forgotten, and its petty duties disappeared in a pleasant circle where all gave free rein to their best spirits, and Holcomb suddenly rose to the full height of his delightful emptiness. May Braddock probably never saw anybody like Holcomb before. She stared at him and listened to him with slight trepidation, not knowing at what moment his gayety of heart would break something. But it never did.

John was playing the host for the first time in his new home, and it was very delightful to see these unlike people melt for the time being into his own circle.

Holcomb, as an incident, might be very refreshing, like a shower, but a shower loses all its gladness when it threatens to become permanent, and John had a good many serious things on his mind that worried him, and he would have given much to have found a serious and sympathetic listener who could have entered into his perplexities. Sitting there under the trees in the evening, Lucy announced with the

ENTERTAINS ANGELS UNAWARES

air of a discoverer that Holcomb composed and sung his own songs. "You should hear him sing one of his own compositions," she said to May Braddock.

"Oh, if you only would," said May Braddock, promptly. "What kind of songs do you compose, Mr. Holcomb? — classic or romantic?"

"Only the too-ral-oo-ral kind, Miss Braddock," he replied. "Those naive outgivings of the heart which have no meaning."

May Braddock looked at Holcomb very much as if he were a curiosity. The too-ral-oo-ral was something beyond her grasp.

"I should like to hear a song that has no meaning," she said. "Most of the popular songs have too much."

"Then I am your pansy," said Holcomb. "Mine is a simple goo-goo of the soul. I call it the mayonnaise of music, made to be poured over the dessert of one's indifference. It makes the sad heart gay, that's all."

Then the women coaxed him into the house, and presently, through the open window came the thump of the cottage piano and a rich, high baritone, rollicking through the following song:—

THE PRETTY LITTLE TOO-RAL-OO-RAL-A

A catbird sat on a mulberry spray
And told his tale to the night.
He had nothing to tell, and he told it so well,
That the moon she was filled with delight.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

She listened all night and she listened all day
To the mystic charm which, I might as well say,
Was nothing on earth but a too-ral-a.
Such a ravishing, rollicking, melting strain,
It was half of it gladness and half of it pain,
Till it seemed she could listen forever and aye
To his pretty little too-ral-oo-ral-a.

A lover leaned over a high-backed chair,
And poured out his aching heart
To a pensive and languishing maiden fair
From whom he could never part.
What it was that he said from his burning soul,
The maiden could never by any means say,
It was only a ravishing too-ral-a.
And she lost her heart and she lost her head,
She never could tell what it was he said,
But she died all the same in the ravishing sway
Of his pretty little too-ral-oo-ral-a.

And in Nature and Life it is always so.
The breezes play and the waters flow,
And the thing that will win in the night or the day
Is the thing that we never by any means say.
If your love would be deep and forever stay,
You must give it its own sweet ravishing sway,
With nothing to guide it but too-ral-a.
For the heart that is purest is sure to be caught
With the sound that is free from suspicion of thought.
To sigh and to simper is much the best way
With a pretty little too-ral-oo-ral-a.

When they returned to the trees where John
and Sprague were sitting, Holcomb cried out:
“Now don’t shatter the charm by asking me
what it means. If I had ever succeeded in mean-

ENTERTAINS ANGELS UNAWARES

ing anything I should be as superior and as sad as Sprague."

But nobody made any comments. The fleeting odour of too-ral-oo-ral seemed to be beyond the general grasp. Mother, who resumed her rocker, leaned over to May Braddock, and asked, "Do you use pound-for-pound in doing up blackberries?" and John, who had apparently been discussing material things with Sprague, took up the broken thread of his conversation and remarked, "I find that the common hydraulic cement, one-twenty-five a barrel, answers my purpose quite as well as Portland cement."

Holcomb looked from one to the other. Lucy was the only person in whom the too-ral-oo-ral appeared to be struggling for a lodgment. She promptly came to Holcomb's assistance, and said, "You are a positive relief, Mr. Holcomb, in a place where everything has a tendency to settle down into seriousness."

"Ah," said Holcomb, "you are a musician, and know that song, after all, is only an aroma. Miss Braddock, I fancy, does not care for music."

"Yes, I do," said May Braddock, tartly, "music that means something."

"O why reduce it to such a dreadful level — with dirt-heaps and stones and red cement?" asked Holcomb. "If you want meaning, look about you; look at Sprague."

"I can listen to the great songs, almost religiously," said May Braddock, "but your too-

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

ral-oo-ral is in a language that I have not learned."

"The great songs," repeated Holcomb with an air of awe, "as for instance?"

May Braddock thought a moment. "If you will sing 'Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes,'"

Holcomb began clutching at something in the air, as if a distant vision had passed before him. "Gracious," he said, "you like songs with eyes in them, don't you — like potatoes? It's truly rural, which is the next thing to being too-ral-oo-ral. I've got a song of my own, all eyes, like an audience at a vaudeville. When you go in I will sing it to you — straight, and win back your faith in me."

Then nothing would do but Lucy must insist, with that delightful perversity that belongs to all delightful women, that they must go in and hear a song aimed straight at Miss Braddock, and when Holcomb got them into an encircling group, with May Braddock close beside him, he started in on another of his compositions which he called —

BLUE EYES TOLD ME SO

I asked myself when in my youth,
If womankind were ended,
If anywhere in life was truth
With gentleness still blended.
Oh, yes, my heart would always say,
The truth at last you'll know.

ENTERTAINS ANGELS UNAWARES

(At this point Holcomb turned and looked with most killing effect at May Braddock, as he added the last lines :)

I looked into a face one day,
And blue eyes told me so.

(Sprague, who was looking at the carpet and pulling his light mustache, added a blushing refrain of his own at this manœuvre.)

Can woman love as calmly sweet
As once our mothers did ;
And under all the guiles we meet
Is constancy still hid ?
Oh, yes, my heart replied, she can,
As in the long ago.

(The same killing languishment, as he added :)

Just look into blue eyes, my man,
And they will tell you so.

(Blushing refrain from Sprague.)

So now I've grown mature, indeed,
And hold to something true.
The little grain of mustard seed
Has grown, my love, like you.
The flowers are springing in my heart
From the rains of long ago.

(Languishment *fortissimo* :)

I look into your face, my love,
Blue eyes have told me so.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

No sooner was this ditty rounded up, with Lucy doing all the applauding and Sprague all the blushing, than John took his friend by the arm, and they went back under the trees, where the serious thread of their former conversation was picked up.

"You see, as I was telling you," John began, "I've got a clear picture in my mind of what I want to do, but it is next to impossible to make anybody see it till it is framed and hung up."

"Always the way with pictures," said Sprague. "Always a bad idea to have everybody in the studio with you, where it's dirty work, and they misunderstand your model."

"What I object to," said John, "is that they will not take my word for it — that it *is* a picture. Even my wife — the best woman that ever lived, Sprague — thinks it's a dirt-heap, and when I get enthusiastic about it, she says, 'Yes, John, but it was all so comfortable before you disturbed it,' and that's crushing. As for the old residents about here, they do not believe in anything that they have not seen. The mason told me that a cistern built in the shape of a parallelogram was some kind of a heresy. He had always seen them built round, and he didn't like to depart from the faith of his fathers. There's that stone wall over there. It's a fine quarry. Some of the boulders at the bottom of it weigh a ton. They only needed splitting up to make the best building material in the world. When I proposed to split them the mason said

ENTERTAINS ANGELS UNAWARES

it wouldn't pay — they would have to be drilled and blasted, and if I bought the drills, sledges, tamps, and powder and fuse a man couldn't get away with much more than one of them in a day, and it would cost more than it was worth. If I had been a man who depended on the experience of the veterans, I would have given up the job, for I calculated that, with this old process of drilling and blasting, the stone would cost me about eighteen cents a cubic foot to get it out. But you are not interested in these details."

"Oh, it's just lovely," said Sprague. "Go on."

"Well, do you know what I did? I found a man who had been taking out trees over in the mountains. I learned something. He did not cut the trees down with an axe and leave a stump that would take four men and a yoke of oxen two days to get out. He simply poked a hole down among the roots with a crowbar, shoved a dynamite cartridge with a fuse on it, into the hole, and lifted the tree, roots and all, into the air."

"Lovely," said Sprague. "Go on."

"Then I remembered that one spring, when there had been a washout on the West Shore Railroad, and a big boulder had come down on the track, and all the expert workmen of the neighbourhood were calculating how long it would take to get it off — the engineers came up on a construction car, laid a cartridge on top of it, and blew it to flinders in about fifteen minutes. My man Mart and I uncovered some of the big stones,

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

and several of them were as big as hogsheads. Swarthout came over and looked at them. 'Cost you about five dollars and fifty cents to bury one of 'em,' said he. 'Don't intend to bury 'em,' said I. 'Cost you almost as much to drill 'em,' said he. 'Don't intend to drill 'em,' said I. He looked like a yawning gulf of compassionate superciliousness. 'Mebbe,' says he, 'you be agoin' to saw 'em up into slabs fer mantelpieces.' My dynamite man drove up one day when the women and the boy were off driving. He laid a cartridge on each one of the stones, and they fell into sharp-faced building chunks, just as nicely as if he had cut a pumpkin-pie with a knife."

"Lovely," said Sprague. "Go on."

"When Swarthout came over and saw the boulders all divided up beautifully, the expression of his face paid me for the cartridges. Regular Quincy granite, some of those stones. Shouldn't wonder if they had rolled down from Massachusetts a million years ago — but this tires you."

"No, no," said Sprague. "It's a fairy tale. Go on."

"Well, sir, I said to myself, 'I can rebuild the whole of that house with such a fine quarry at my elbow.' But I haven't said it to anybody else for fear they might put me in the insane asylum."

"Have you a definite plan of the proposed house?"

"In my mind, yes. You see, I can put a stone bay on this end, the whole width, to please my wife — I ought to tell you she comes from the

ENTERTAINS ANGELS UNAWARES

Bay State. Then I can run that north room out into a dining-room, and fetch the roof down in a long sweep over the porch, and put a stone tower on the north end. Do you catch the idea?"

"Exactly. I'll make a picture of it for you."

"Will you? That's just what I want. If you could put in the grounds as they will be when that cistern is working ——"

"Good enough. How will they be?"

"First, a good solid piece of rustic stonework laid up in front for the fence — one of those walls about four feet high with the sharp, natural stone sticking out of them at regular intervals, with two carriage entrances flanked in time by two stone gate-posts that I shall take my time to build. Then a footpath entrance in the centre, all of them laid down in hard gravel and running through a perfectly level and bright green lawn, with shrubs and heavily massed flowers bordering the roads and the path. You know the kind of flowers — petunias, sweet peas, poppies, marigolds, with flaming bunches of canna and salvia. But what I specially count on are the shadows of those old trees on the lawns."

"Lovely," said Sprague.

"The road will circle around the house and be gravelled, probably blue-stone, if it doesn't cost too much, and the *ombra* or porch of the house will come down into a suggestion of a *porte cochère*."

"Lovely," said Sprague. "What's it going to cost?"

"Just what I can afford to pay by the week —

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

and that's the point of it. Nobody ever heard of a man doing it by the week. If I die in the attempt, I shall at least be entitled to the encomium that he tried to be original and luxurious on twenty-four hundred a year. I suppose I'm destroying what little faith you had in me. It usually acts that way with most persons."

"Not at all," said Sprague, "it's quite delicious. You'll do it. Any man who can dig a hole like that in spite of the opinions of mankind, can do anything that's reasonable."

"You can understand," continued John, "that there wouldn't be any fun in it if I were able to do it."

"No?" queried Sprague.

"I mean that if I were able to command it all done by fiat, it wouldn't be inspiring. There is a kind of zest in walking on the edge of a beautiful precipice, that would be lost if one had wings. A man must overcome opposition, face incredulity, turn the other cheek also, make brains take the place of capital, and have patience enough to wait ten years; then, if he isn't broken down by contumely and drudgery, perhaps his children will get the reward."

"How lovely," said Sprague.

As John had meant this to be slightly querulous, he looked at Sprague and said, "What's lovely?"

"To be sure of your reward at the end of ten years," replied Sprague.

"But I'm not sure of it — that's the deuce of it."

ENTERTAINS ANGELS UNAWARES

"Oh, yes, you are; you are arriving all the time and bringing the reward with you."

"Do you think so?"

"Sure. I wish I had as big a hole in the ground as that to be proud of. I've seen you looking at it with admiration every half hour."

John laughed. "I suppose you are right," he said. "There is some kind of delight in shaping dull material to your will; but it is so slow and stubborn."

"Nobody knows that so well as an artist," replied Sprague. "If he could transfer his pictures from his mind to his canvas without wrestling with the earths, he would never paint — only dream. Tell me all about the hole."

"It's only a cistern. It looks like an inspiration or a bugaboo because it is so big — that's all. But when it is done and covered up, I shall feel like a man who has hidden his treasure in the ground. If I can live down the contumely meanwhile, I shall be paid. Do you know what they say in the village — I am looking for Captain Kidd's gold up here."

"Lovely," said Sprague, "and you'll find it. A man has to dig, I suppose, for everything, except ——"

"Yes, except fame."

"No, I didn't mean that. I was going to say that he can get almost everything out of the earth except ——"

"Yes, except what?"

"Well, except too-ral-oo-ral-a."

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

Then the two men looked at each other, and as Lucy and May Braddock came up, they found them shaking hands.

After this conversation, John had much more respect for Sprague, and it annoyed him to see that Lucy did not share his feeling. "I can at least tolerate Holcomb as a harmless divertimento," Lucy said, "but what you can see in Sprague to admire is beyond me."

"My dear, he is the only person I have met who sympathizes with me in my struggles."

"Well," said Lucy, "he gets red in the face while he is doing it — it must be that he is ashamed of it. Besides, he kicked the cat when he thought I did not see him."

"What," exclaimed John, trying to suppress his exultation, "kicked Medusa?"

"Yes. I did not intend to tell you, as he is your guest. But now it is out. I hope it will open your eyes."

"It does," said John.

Sprague came into the workshop one morning. It was Sunday, and the guests were going away on the morrow. John was desecrating the day with a rip-saw.

"Sprague," he said, laying down the saw, "there are some little things that serve as links between human souls. They are trifles, but they draw men closer together."

"Are you referring to the cistern?"

"No," said John; "I am referring to the cat. You kicked her."

ENTERTAINS ANGELS UNAWARES

Sprague blushed.

"It was one of those little acts," continued John, "that make the world of masculinity kin. I have tried to kick her for a month myself, but she kept herself under the eye of the women, and I miserably failed. You detest the cat," and John held out his hand.

"I saw her eat six young bobolinks down in your meadow," said Sprague, "and not content with that, she finished off with the mother bird. But perhaps I should not have resented her act if she had not given me such a look of concentrated and sublime contempt."

"Yes," said John. "I know the look well. It is the most remarkable case of animal slang on record. She was brought here to kill moles. She has killed nothing but birds, and the moles run over her while she sleeps. But the women, God bless them, condone and spoil her on account of her fur. I tried my best to make friends with her when she came, but she treated me with queenly disdain from the start. I stroked her and called her Pretty Puss, at which she rolled up her yellow eyes at me and walked away contemptuously, saying as plain as a newsboy in Frankfort Street could say it, 'Oh, you go shoot yourself!' and opposed as I am to such vulgar language in my own household, I am compelled to put up with it in order to keep peace in the family. Mart tells me that since she came here she has eaten twenty-one young robins, six song sparrows, twelve bobolinks, eight meadow larks, four wrens, and three thrushes, and

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

my respected mother-in-law says that the cat is an invalid, and that I ought to get some kind of prepared food for her because she will not eat her cream. How am I going to save the birds, Sprague, without breaking up my family?"

The two men looked at each other in silent sympathy a moment. Then Sprague whispered: "You ought to try a bull terrier. I'll send you up a pup."

Neither of the men knew what he was about, or he would have paused. They shook hands once more, and buried in their bosoms the secret that was eventually to imperil the household.

The guests had gone away, and Lucy had noticed that May Braddock came to the station to bid Sprague good-by, and that they had some confidential adieus in a corner of the waiting-room, which led her to remark to John, "I shouldn't wonder if it were a match — there's no accounting for tastes."

Then passed several weeks, during which time John concentrated all his energies on his cistern. He stuck to it grimly. The stone walls rose slowly and the brick arch finally spanned the gulf. The plumbers came and worked wonderingly at a system of pipes that seemed superfluous. There were overflow and drainage pipes, supply pipes, pipe for kitchen pump, and pipe that was intended for an unbuilt tower — all snugly hidden down there and costing a great deal more than John had dared to contemplate. But it was finished at last, and when the soil was raked over it, and

ENTERTAINS ANGELS UNAWARES

he stood on the square slab that marked the man-hole, and thought of the engineering provision that he had made under his feet, he could not help wondering secretly if he would ever get the two hundred dollars back that it had cost him.

With what boyish interest he and Mart watched for the first shower. How eagerly they rushed out and turned off the jointed leader, so that the first dash of rain that washed the roof clean would not go into the reservoir; and then, as they made the connection again, and listened to the gush of water in the echoing vault, what satisfaction and pride beamed in their faces as they stood there in the downpour and watched the trembling and gushing leaders. The more furiously the rain fell, the more they exulted. "To think," said John, "that the clouds have been dropping fatness for years, and nobody thought it worth while to pick it up." With what gusto they drew the first beakerful from the kitchen pump, and how they smacked their lips over it, and insisted that it did not taste of cement, and how utterly useless it was to try and make the women like it! Mother said it had a flavour of shingles. Lucy detected a smoky taste. Her enthusiasm went no further than to acknowledge that it would be a great convenience on wash-days. So John had to work off his enthusiasm in a letter to Sprague, and was much comforted by a prompt reply that it was "lovely," to which a postscript was added to the following effect: "I send you, per Wells-Fargo, a thoroughbred bull-terrier pup,

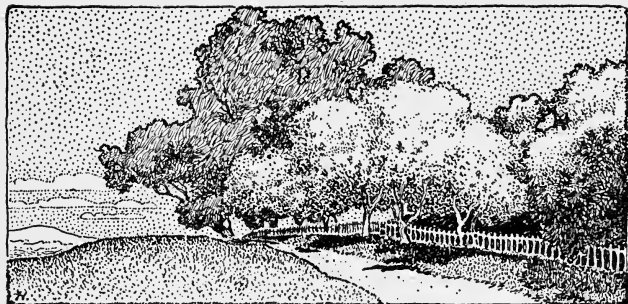
MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

out of Belcher's 'Virago,' by Pettibones's 'Pittsburgh Crib.' You will have to rig a bottle and rubber teat for him."

Then there was a season of relapse, when John and Lucy spent their evenings under the cedars quietly, listening to mother as she made a schedule of what she had preserved that day. Wesley, John said, was taking his vacation; he had not seen him for a week. "I think," he remarked, "that he is going to leave our firm; going into some new speculation. Your husband is safe from that sort of thing now, my dear."

But scarcely had they felicitated themselves on their happy immunity, when, presto, Wesley and his wife drove up to their gate.





CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH THE TEMPTER ENTERS

LUCY greeted her old friend, Kate Ellis, with genuine heartiness, mingled with much trepidation, and John welcomed Wesley with a great show of cordiality. But the visitors were uninterested in the explanations that ensued. Kate was fashionably attired, and Wesley was fitted out in the latest watering-place suit. Indeed, their mere appearance was sufficient to put some kind of new responsibility upon their hosts to keep up with it.

"Now, you must put up with everything as you find it, dear," began Lucy. "Everything is torn to pieces, but I'm so glad you came. You know we are just plain country folk now."

"Gracious," said Kate, "how do you stand it?"

"Oh, I always loved the country, you know.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

Just come round and see the view from the rear of the house. All our treasures are out of doors. Whatever brought you up so unexpectedly?"

"Wes wanted to see John on a matter of business—it's really important—the greatest piece of luck. Can't we go in and sit down?"

"I want you to see the view first," replied Lucy. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"Yes," said Kate, without looking at it. "Lovely. You see Wes has got hold of a splendid business chance, and he wants John to join him. There's a fortune in it."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Lucy. "That's the Mahwah River down there. I'll take you down and show you the meadow when you get your things off."

"Charming," said Kate. "I don't think we'll have time to enjoy it. Don't you find it lonesome?"

"You know I always wanted a home of my own. We are going to enlarge the house. Wouldn't you like to see the garden?"

"I suppose you keep cows and pigs and things. Heavens, Lucy Dennison, I always thought you were meant to shine in the best circles, and not become a dairymaid—and you would, too, if John were not so narrow."

"Narrow! Oh, come now—everybody who knows John says he is a yard wide."

"I know," said Kate, "and all wool. But you are silk, my dear, and made for society. What are you going to do when you get tired of this?"

THE TEMPTER ENTERS

Why, you will be utterly ruined for society. Haven't you thought of that?"

"I'm afraid I have not," said Lucy, laughingly. "John will not let me get tired of it."

"You put me out of all patience—whatever has come over you. I believe your husband has hypnotized you. I wish you would give me a glass of ice-water. Can't we go in? I don't want to be ruined by freckles."

"I will give you a nice glass of cool well water," replied Lucy. "How would you like a glass of fresh milk?"

"Milk will do. I don't suppose you have any Vichy, have you? How absurd I am!"

When they were inside and the milk had been placed before her, Kate lifted her veil, took an occasional sip, and continued:—

"Now I do hope that you will not be silly. Wes has got hold of the biggest kind of a chance, and he wants John to go in with him."

"Speculation?" cried Lucy. "He'll never get John into it."

"Speculation—nonsense. It's a capitalized company with millions behind it. Syndicate, my dear. Everything is syndicates nowadays. They have offered Wes five thousand a year and a percentage."

"Good gracious!" said Lucy. "You don't like the milk, do you?"

"To tell you the truth, dear, I'm not used to drinking it clear. It's awfully foolish, but do you know, clear milk is so cowy. But as I was

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

saying, Wes and I have about made up our minds to launch out. We've scratched along until we're tired of it. What's the use, one might as well get some comfort out of life while it lasts. Wes has got a whole line of customers in the West at his call, and the new company knows it—so has John. Anyway, we're going in for ourselves this time. I've about made up my mind that I can't get along decently on a beggarly two thousand a year. No more can you, dear."

"But it's so sure," said Lucy.

"Yes, slow and sure, and that's just what I'm tired of. A woman likes something a little faster, even if it isn't so dead open and shut. Wes and I are going to take care of Number One, and that's what you must do. Let me tell you—I've been looking at a house in Forty-second Street—four story and basement, stone front, high stoop, only three thousand a year—sixteen rooms, saloon parlour, steam heated, back stairs for servants, conservatory addition. Can't you go back with me? I want you to look at it. It's near all the theatres, the opera house, and the hotels. Put on your things and come on down with me. I'll tell you all about it."

"Why, you're not going straight back, I hope."

"Yes, we must. Wes has got his hands full. He only came up to get John into it, and I came with him to take you back. Don't be foolish. I want you to see that dining-room. I can seat thirty people in it."

THE TEMPTER ENTERS

"How nice," said Lucy. "But three thousand a year, Kate — my!"

"If John knows when he is well off and we took it together, the rent wouldn't be so much, and as for the furnishing, Wes has made all the arrangements. You know it isn't customary to pay cash now for furnishing — the syndicates do it for you."

Lucy tried to be purringly evasive. "What a handsome dress that is," she said.

"Don't you like the sleeve? It's bolero. I thought it would catch you."

"Yes, there's nothing so pretty as a bell sleeve with an edging of lace below the elbow, is there — and puffs at the wrist?"

"I'll show you my bolero figured dining-robe when you come down. This cost me eighty-five dollars. Heavens, Lucy, you see Wes *must* branch out somewhere if we are to keep up with the times. How do the trains run on that horrid railroad of yours?"

Meanwhile John was fondly pointing out to Wesley the matchless opportunities which the place afforded for improvements. "I've got a cistern there forty feet long," said John, pointing to the long surface of raw earth that was spread over his subterranean achievement.

Wes looked at it wonderingly. "What's it for?" he asked.

"Water," said John triumphantly. "Planned and built it myself."

"Can't we go in where it is cool and sit down? I want to talk to you."

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"Let me show you the place first."

"Fine place," said Wes. "Let's go under those trees."

When they were seated under the cedars, Wes began at once. "I've got the biggest kind of a thing in tow, old fellow," he said, "and I want you in with me."

"Is it the new company that I heard of—some kind of a coöperative scheme?"

"I don't know what you've heard, but I'm on the inside. Capital, three millions. They propose to do business farther up town, and combine the wholesale and retail departments. They have offered me five thousand a year and five per cent commission on out-of-town customers."

"Then you're going to leave our house?"

"Well, I'm going to look out for myself. Cramp is in the company, and what he says, goes. He asked me if I thought you would join them if you got a good offer. That's what I'm here for."

John shook his head. "I don't think I'm in a position now to take any new chances," he said. "Besides, our firm has always treated me so handsomely."

"Oh, don't give me that. You've got all those Minnesota buyers at your back, and now is the time to turn your advantage to some account. It will be worth five or six thousand a year to you, and I thought that if you and I took a house together, we could bag a lot of those Western fellows socially without trotting round

THE TEMPTER ENTERS

to the hotels. Besides, the women will have a chance to see life as it is. Kate was looking at a house in Forty-second Street yesterday. I spoke to Cramp about it and he said it was a good game. You'll be tired of this thing up here before winter. I'll bet a supper Lucy is tired of it now."

"Oh, you're dead wrong on that point," said John. "Let's take a walk over the grounds. I want to show you the garden."

"I'll tell you how it is, old man," Wesley said without heeding the invitation. "You and I must snatch our chance when it comes our way, and there's a pot of money to be blown in on this scheme, and we might as well have some of it."

"Does Kate approve of it?"

"Approve of it? Why, she's red hot for it. Kate wasn't built on the twenty-four hundred a year gauge. You leave Lucy to her, she'll talk her round. If you'll come down with me to-night and stay over, I'll introduce you to Cramp to-morrow. We can have a little dinner at the Holland House—you'll like Cramp—and then we can go to the Casino."

"It's no use, Wes," said John; "I'm all tied up here, and I can't think of it."

"Cramp will talk you out of that strain in fifteen minutes. Good Lord, man, you ought to think of your wife and boy."

"I'll talk to Lucy about it. There's plenty of time. You are going to stay to dinner, of course."

"Dinner? No. We've got to jump back. Kate and I are going to a reception of the Buyers'

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

Club, and we want you to come with us. Come on, old chap. You will meet all the new men and we'll get you back into the swim."

John only shook his head, and vainly tried to press his hospitality upon his friend. But the humble natural advantages of his home somehow appeared to dwindle in the presence of this company, and when they went hurriedly away, John took a long breath of relief, as if a distressing weight had been removed, and he and his wife looked at each other in silence a moment. Then John said:—

"What did you say to Kate?"

"Why, what could I say, except that I supposed she would have a gay time of it."

"So she will, my dear, while it lasts."

"And you don't think it will last?"

"No; nothing ever lasts very long with Kate."

"I suppose," said Lucy, "that Wes would tell you that when nothing is risked nothing is gained."

"But that cheap remark wouldn't influence you any more than it does me."

"Well," said Lucy, "Kate will have a lot of fun, I dare say. I should just like to see for once how it felt to spend money instead of saving it."

"Some other person's money?" queried John.

"You told Wes that you wouldn't entertain the idea?"

"I gave him to understand that you wouldn't consent to it, and that I always consulted you."

"My," said Lucy, thinking of the four-story

THE TEMPTER ENTERS

house and the saloon parlour. "How disappointed Kate will be."

"But you are not disappointed, are you?"

"No," she replied hesitatingly. "I wasn't made to shine in the same circle with Kate. Did you notice her dress? She said it cost her eighty-five dollars."

"Then I'll wager it isn't paid for."

"It must be fun to have everything you want without worrying about paying for it. Maybe Wes will make a fortune and not kill himself with hard work. Isn't that the way fortunes are made nowadays, dear? Think of five thousand a year, John."

"It sounded to me like five thousand birds in the bush."

"You always were so timid, dear."

"Have you come to that conclusion?"

"I? Oh, no. That is what Kate said."

"Oh, she said that, did she? Confound her impudence. I believe she upset your mind with that eighty-five-dollar dress."

"Well, you must acknowledge, dear, that it was perfectly stunning. I tried my best to influence her mind with my one bird in hand, but it didn't work at all."

"Oh, a woman doesn't understand a bird in hand," said John, testily. "All she cares for is a bird in her hat. I don't see why they don't wear cats on their bonnets—it would be more appropriate."

"How mean you can be, John," said Lucy.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"What's the cat got to do with it? You are almost as bad as your cat-lawyer."

"Oh, of course. A man who has a steady purpose and sticks to it must be insane. In my opinion, Kate is a cat, and you are bewildered by her fur."

"You forget that she is an old friend of mine."

"No, I don't. I wish I could. If she'd stay away I might."

"Stay away? Do you want to cut off the only friend I've got? Perhaps you don't wish me to visit Kate."

"Oh, you want to visit her now, don't you?"

"Good heavens, John, do you object to that?"

"She asked you to come down and look at the house."

"Was it a crime?"

"And you want to go?"

"If I did, I suppose you would put your foot down. Don't go too far, John, a woman is different from a cistern."

This allusion to his pet hole in the ground stung him a little, and he gave way to a retort. "It's a pity," he said, "that she is. She might be made to store up something if she wasn't."

Then it was Lucy's turn. "You'll find," she said with a sob, "that a woman can't be made part of your irrigation plant," and then with a woman's contradictory nature, she began to cry.

"When you are in a better humour," said John, as he walked away, "perhaps you will take another view of it."

THE TEMPTER ENTERS

In the well-regulated affairs of ordinary married mortals such occurrences as these are called spats. They correspond to what in lovers' affairs are called tiffs, only they resemble the former as the rain resembles the mist. They are of no more apparent use to the domestic system than the vermiform appendix appears to be to the corporeal system, but they are as prevalent and as annoying. Perhaps in a larger view of humanity they may be seen to play the part of March winds and stir up the lethargic impulses of life. Who knows?

John strode off with a fine evanescent indignation, and his wife went in to her mother, wiping her eyes.

As he passed the back porch on his way to his workshop, he saw Medusa lying in all her plenitude of equable superiority, in the twilight. As he approached she gave him a calm look of Oriental contempt and went into the house, saying with all the silent eloquence of feline felicity, "Keep your distance, miserable man; you ought to see that we belong to different orders of life."

Such a trivial occurrence could not in itself have stirred up inhuman reflections in John's mind, but it probably came at a time when the mind was predisposed to relieve itself by some kind of irrational action, and he instinctively picked up a brick to heave at the animal. He was just about to throw it, when his mother-in-law appeared at the door, picked up Medusa with affectionate tenderness, and disappeared.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

The consciousness that in another second the brick would have landed squarely upon the benign person of that old lady, producing a wreck that was inconceivably terrible, only added to John's baffled irritation. He threw down the missile and stalked moodily to the workshop. There he found Mart down on his knees nursing the bull-terrier pup that Sprague had sent him. Mart's hands were dabbled with blood, and with one of them he held a small bottle of vaseline.

"What are you up to?" asked John, a little severely, as if Mart offered a good target for his unexpressed discomfiture.

"Just patching up the pup's nose," said Mart. "The little chap followed me up to the house, and the cat tore a piece out of his smeller."

"Oh, she did. I suppose we'll have to kill the pup to accommodate that d—d cat."

Mart smiled. "No, sir," he said, "if we take good care of him, I think it will be the other way. Cats is a good deal like women, sir, they can't measure up what they can't see. He'll bite her in two some day. Look at the jaw of him. That's a good dog, sir. It would have paid the cat to have made friends with him. But he's a baby, sir, and he don't know what kind of world he's got into yet."

This conversation put John into a better humour, and later in the evening, when he and Lucy came together again, they began to set their stunsails and shake out their top hamper, as a sailor would say, as if there was a dead calm in view.

THE TEMPTER ENTERS

"What hurt me, John," said Lucy, "was your unfeeling insinuation that I had lost all interest in our home, just because I wanted to go down and see how Kate's foolish experiment works. You know she's an old friend, and I couldn't help taking some interest in her welfare."

"And it was so unlike you, Lucy," said John, "to think that I would object to your going down. And then you spoke disrespectfully of the cistern."

"Well, John dear, I never would, I am sure, if you hadn't lugged the cat into it. If Kate should have a house in the city next winter, it would be very convenient for us if we wanted to run down and stay over, and we might want to when the cold weather sets in. I just thought I'd like to see what the women are going to wear this fall."

"And you were mean enough to think I'd object to it—that's what hurt me," said John.

"Oh, I never did," said Lucy. "You misunderstood me. You always do fly off in that manner. I should think you knew me well enough to trust me out of your sight."

"Of course I do," said John. "I would trust you anywhere. But my great comfort is that nobody else will."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I refer to the confounded tradesmen. The trouble with Kate is that all the tradesmen do trust her."

At this point he suppressed the conversation

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

with gentle violence, and utterly prevented his wife's mouth, which had budded to a retort, from bursting into a reply.

A few days later, and Lucy accompanied him to the city. He came back without her. He noticed how absurdly lonesome the place looked, and he wondered if this was what the newspapers called "a new departure." Some misgivings he had that were not easily overcome, though he struggled very hard to dispel them. "I'll make hay while the sun shines," he remarked to himself encouragingly. "Appearances go a great ways with women. I must on with my work and get this place into inviting shape." He thought of how poor a show his old stone house made to his city visitors; how disdainfully Kate had swept her eye over the solid and squat structure, and how carefully Wes had avoided all reference to it. But this only piqued his pride a little, and if some one had offered him ten thousand a year at that moment, to abandon his scheme, he would have rejected it with scorn. "No, sir," he said, "I'll show them all that I've got the right idea. Hold fast is the better dog — by thunder, I'll go down to the shed and look at my pup's jaw."

It was at this stage in John's domestic career that the project of making a country home entered upon its determinative course. It had not been plain sailing altogether, and he felt that he had not received the sympathy to which he was entitled. Now that he was alone with his work,

THE TEMPTER ENTERS

the results looked meagre enough by the side of the stupendous thoughts and toil they had exacted. He had spent months of prodigious labour and nothing was visible to the eye. His greatest feat of all was buried in the ground, as if he had been making a grave. Might it not be that he was making a mistake, committing indeed the folly that so many men commit when they retire with a chimera to the country? Then, if he was wrong, Wes would be right, and might not the fellows like Wes, who made up their minds to get all there is out of life while it passes, be really the fortunate if not the successful fellows? He looked at his unfinished stone fence along the front of the property. It had a pre-tentious irony at times as if it were overstrained. He knew very well that the passers-by, who saw the property in its discouraging aspects, made supercilious remarks, and said, "What do you suppose that fellow is trying to do with that old place?" He had seen the ironical smiles and their good-natured incredulity. Nobody believed in him. Even Mr. Swarthout was complacently waiting to take the property back when the wild experiment had exhausted itself.

These are the discouragements that no ordinary man escapes who has set himself a task to perform. But it is worth recording that the ordinary man, capable of setting himself a worthy task that involves his purely masculine qualities, is usually supplied with a dogged determination that has to be reckoned with. The ordinary

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

man does not like to be beaten even by events. John did not use that word, he had an idiom of his own. He looked at the stubborn chaos about him, thought of the incredulity of his friends, and said, "Well, I've gone into the fight, and I'm not going to be licked."

Sometimes the phraseology of the ordinary man means so much that it is not wise to translate it into a politer currency. This feeling of aggressive grip approaches to heroism, especially when there are limited resources of friends and money, but it is a heroism very much like the poet's or the soldier's, apt to be posthumous in its celebration.

John went to Mr. Braddock. Why he went there it would be impossible to say. He did not know himself. He caught that lawyer walking up and down in his office with a red carnation in one hand and a white carnation in the other, sniffing at them alternately with meditative beaminess.

"I thought, perhaps," said John, "you could tell me of a good reliable builder, a carpenter who is out of a job. I want to consult him about altering my house. The fact is, I want associate counsel of a practical kind."

Mr. Braddock broke out with a placid refulgence as he sniffed at the white carnation. "Do you think," he asked, "that the colour of a flower is in any way determinative of its odour? I fancy that this white pink, which does not catch the eye like the red pink, has a subtler fragrance. What do you think?"

THE TEMPTER ENTERS

"I'm in a good deal of a quandary with respect to my improvements," continued John, "and I wish to consult with a thoroughgoing mechanic. You might know of a man who is disengaged, and reasonable, somebody of experience who wants work."

Mr. Braddock walked to the door of his office. "Benton," he said, "what's Ridabok doing?"

"Nothing, I guess," answered the voice of Benton.

"The odour of flowers," resumed Mr. Braddock, "is an interesting study, entirely on the side of temperament. How's Medusa?"

"Is Mr. Ridabok a carpenter?" asked John.

"Mr. Ridabok," replied Mr. Braddock, with an inscrutable smile, "is a white carnation. You're not looking for colour, are you? He doesn't catch the eye, but he has more temperament than most of them; puts you in mind of a bunch of sweet-william growing in the corner of an old garden. It always looks as if the garden was trying to get away from it."

"Is he a good workman? That's what I want to know."

"Yes, that's his misfortune."

"Why misfortune?"

"Because I don't think we care for good workmen nowadays. You see he's built half the old houses in this place, and it costs more to pull them down than it's worth. These old fellows, Mr. Dennison, never made any provision for

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

pulling down. They built houses as if they expected a man's children to live in them, and when the children came to tear them to pieces it didn't pay. You'll find that old house of yours underpinned with locust and laid down on sills of oak hewn out with a broadaxe and double morticed. The old fools had no conception of a millennium."

"I don't propose to tear down the old house. I want to improve it a little in my own way, and I want a man who will do just what I tell him and work by the week. I'll furnish the ideas and the money. He is to furnish the labor and the skill. You see, I wish to avoid a contractor and an architect. I want to take my own time, stop when I please, and do as I like generally. If I can get hold of a good man who wants to work and is content to work my way, I might give him a job for half a year. Is Mr. Ridabok the sort of chap I am looking for?"

"Mr. Ridabok is very unfortunate. In the first place, he insists on getting old, and that is unpardonable. What can you do with a man who gets to be fifty-five without knowing it, and will have the rheumatism occasionally without paying any attention to it? No adaptability; insists on morticing his studding instead of nailing it; don't believe in patent siding or Mansard roofs."

"I should say," remarked John, "that he might have some reliable, old-fashioned notions."

"Just so," said Mr. Braddock. "A regular

THE TEMPTER ENTERS

orthodox old hard-shell builder. Those old fellows seemed to build as if they had eternity in view. You take their work to pieces, and you're sure to come across some old lumber that will not give an inch. It's like one of those old home-made copy-books that our mothers used to stitch together for us, with 'Honesty is the Best Policy' written large at the top. You don't want to bother with that kind of a man, do you? You are young and from the city."

"Yes," said John, "I rather like the description."

Mr. Braddock sniffed for a moment.

"Suppose you stop here to-night and pick him up, I'll have him wait for you."

At that moment May Braddock came into the office, and to John's surprise was accompanied by Mr. Sprague.

"Halloo, Dennison, going to the city? I'll go with you," said Sprague. "How's the pup?"

"There's our train coming now," said John. "Come along."

"Have you got that list of commissions?" asked Mr. Braddock. "Don't forget that new cat food."

"I will attend to them all," said Sprague, blushing, as he followed John out the door, "if I don't get the *par-e-sis* in the city."

"One moment, Mr. Sprague," called May Braddock, and as Sprague and John stopped, she said: "*Par-e-sis*, if you please, Mr. Sprague."

When they were on the train John expressed

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

some surprise at seeing Sprague up there. "Oh, I've commuted," said Sprague.

"You don't say so," said John.

And that night when John wrote a letter to his wife, telling her that her mother was well and was "doing up" blackberries, tomatoes, onions, ground cherries, pickles, and catsup, he added a postscript of startling import, as follows:—

"P.S. — Sprague has commuted."





CHAPTER IX

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF

“**M**R. RIDABOK, I understand from Mr. Braddock that you are one of those sensible men who would rather work for fifteen dollars a week for six months, than work two days out of the week for three dollars and a half a day. Am I right?”

“I d’ know as you are,” said Mr. Ridabok. “I’m one of them men as thinks his work is worth its price.”

“In that I agree with you entirely. I shouldn’t wonder if it was worth more than the prevailing price. But that’s not the question with me. I have fifteen dollars a week to spend and no more, and I must find a good man who is worth a good deal more, but will take all I’ve got and be satisfied with it. Are you that kind of a man?”

“I d’ know as I am,” said Mr. Ridabok. “What is it you want to do?”

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"Rebuild this house," replied John.

"And you hev some doubts about your hevin' money enough."

"Not a doubt in the world," said John, "if I can do it my way. You see you have a great advantage of me. You have a great deal of skill, and I have only a small salary. I was thinking if we met halfway, I could get the benefit of your skill and you could get some of my salary."

Mr. Ridabok looked around at the old-fashioned room critically.

"Thinkin' of makin' a contract?"

"No, only an agreement, to work by the week. Cash every Saturday. When my money gives out, you stop. I'll furnish the ideas and money, you do the work and ask no questions."

"Gimme an idea of what you want to do."

John put the plans before him. Together they studied them inch by inch. One man was reticent, patient, careful, mathematical; the other was explanatory, voluble, enthusiastic — built the house several times, in fact, in the air, while the carpenter was figuring.

"It's goin' to cost you 'bout a thousand dollars," said Mr. Ridabok at last, as he held a two-foot rule in front of him and counted the inches.

John gave a little gulp. "How much of it for lumber and other material?"

Mr. Ridabok fell to figuring again. "I should say roughly about seven hundred dollars. I'll have to go over it carefully."

"Don't you think that it will be a fine-looking

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF

gentleman's place when it is finished?" asked John, holding up the plans.

"Make a nice house," said Mr. Ridabok, guardedly. "When did you think of starting in?"

"Now. Suppose you just figure the stuff in feet. I'll have the first load up here to-morrow, and Mart can bring your tool-chest up in the wagon. Then while you are getting out the lumber I'll have the foundation of the extension and bay put in. You can then rattle on the roof with a helper, close in the whole thing before frost, and work inside when the winter comes."

Mr. Ridabok said nothing. He was figuring. It seemed to John that he was unpardonably slow. But it did not occur to John that he might also be pardonably sure. Finally the schedule, made with a blunt pencil and not as correct in its orthography as in its mathematics, stood out as follows:—

Rafters	912 ft.
Roof boards	16,800 ft.
Plates	218 ft.
Siding	700 ft.
Studding	175 ft.
Estimated cost of lumber	\$300.00
Shingles — 56 bundles	67.00
Bay Window — sash and glass	100.00
Nails	18.00
Carpenter work	300.00
	<hr/>
	\$785.00
Add mason work	100.00
	<hr/>
Total	\$885.00

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

John looked at this result with a double feeling of shrinkage and exultation. But as Mr. Ridabok said nothing about accepting the job, and went on interesting himself in the details, John came to the conclusion that he intended to accept the terms on condition that they were not mentioned again. Practical men have their little intuitions as well as women. Mr. Ridabok managed to convey the idea that he adjusted himself to the condition under compulsion. In fact, it was understood without words that so far as the world was concerned, he was to get three dollars and a half a day, and if he didn't get it nobody would be the wiser; and this point got over with the acumen of silence, Mr. Ridabok went away saying: "I s'pose you'll send for that chist in the mornin'."

When he was gone John stood with contradictory feelings on the edge of his accomplishment, and felt all the exhilaration of a pioneer with some of the misgivings of an amateur.

He had five hundred dollars put by for the mortgage, but the mortgage had four years to run; and he could squeeze the other five hundred piecemeal out of his salary in six months. It was as plain as a pikestaff. He could always renew a trivial mortgage of five hundred dollars on a house that he had spent a thousand on. Lucy was quite right when she said that a man must take some chances if he expected to make a hit.

Many a man before John Dennison had, with the noblest intention, put his foot on this delusive

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF

ground, and found when the time came that he had miscalculated. John knew that well enough, but if he was not a speculator in the ordinary sense of that word, neither was he a sentimentalist. He figured it all out to himself as quite within the allowable scope of a discreet ambition. He would keep everything else down to a minimum of expense until he had accomplished this purpose. It is only fair to him to say that he knew that many men had done this also.

This interview took place on the 26th of August. In two weeks an enormous pile of lumber had been stored up adjacent to the workshop. Mr. Ridabok was working away at the material, and the two-feet foundations were in for the bay and the extension of the dining-room.

John looked on with eager satisfaction. A disaster to himself would now ruin all, and his affairs would be in a worse plight than when he started. But what young man who sets out to run a race calculates the chances of paralysis or lightning? One thing would have made matters more comfortable, he thought. He missed his wife during the first week. He wanted a confidante and partner in the preparation — somebody that he could talk it all over with step by step; the wife could have shown her belief in the result through her faith in him. He thought he was entitled to this, and he had certainly counted on it. At the end of a week Lucy came back. He met her at the railway station in the city, and they came home together. Her appearance surprised him a little.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

Man-like he thought she looked younger, and that piqued him. The fact is, she didn't — she only looked gayer. In matters of appearance men cannot always distinguish between piquancy of manner and freshness of condition. She wore a new and exhilarating hat, and her conversation was dressed in a fresh volubility.

"Well, you dear old drudge," she said, "you never came near me all the time I was in the city, did you? And you knew I had so many things to tell you — what are you staring at — my hat? Isn't it becoming? It's Kate's. How's Harold? I suppose the dear old homestead and the dear old red mud are just the same. Isn't it awfully hot?"

"The hat certainly becomes you," said John, "but I should think it would be more comfortable if it were your own."

"Don't be foolish, dear. I couldn't afford to pay for a hat like that, and Kate has all kinds sent over to her just to try. I don't believe you are glad to see me one bit."

"Oh, yes, I am," replied John, "but I'm not as glad to see you one bit, as I would be to see you every day."

"Really? Everything is torn up, I suppose, as usual."

"Worse than ever. I've had the stone-masons there, and now the carpenter is come."

"How nice! When will they get through? How's Medusa? Don't you want to know how Wes is getting on?"

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF

"Oh, I know," said John. "Wes can only get on in one way. It's humiliating to confess it, but it isn't my way. Is that dandy waist Kate's too?"

"How mean you can be, and you haven't seen me for a week."

And so on, buzz, buzz, till they drove in at their own gate, and, without looking at the foundations or the lumber, Lucy ran into the house and began to hug and kiss the family seriatim, ending up with a superfluous demonstration on Medusa.

It was with some misgiving that John learned of his wife's intention to return to the city. "Yes," she said, aiming her explanation at her mother, "I left Kate down with the sick headache, and she made me promise to come back and stay until she got better. It would be too mean to leave her alone in that big house and she all used up."

But this information was softened with so much sudden interest in the details of John's work, that he did not get a chance to upbraid her. "You must show me the foundations," she said, "and explain everything. And I want to see the lumber—oh, yes, how's the cistern, is that all right? You will explain everything, John, won't you?"

There was not the slightest suspicion in John's mind that her vivacious efforts to act as if she had been away six months were a little overdone, and that she might be crowding as much of a disagreeable duty into a small space, so as to get away to the city as soon as possible. So he kept his temper. How could he do otherwise when

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

a warm arm was locked in his, and there was a purring accompaniment of "my dears," and she wanted to know just how big the bay would be, and expressed unbounded delight at a dining-room that was as yet safely hidden in John's imagination, and even showed an unnatural interest in the pup, that had now grown to be a long, suspicious animal that had to be kept chained in the stable, and that put his head down and lifted his lip to show a white tooth warningly when she said, "Why, you beautiful dog!" And then how she bubbled over with her city experiences. They were so naïve, so prettily trivial against the hard details of home building, that his wife seemed to John to be in a twitter like a bird coming out of freedom to a new cage.

"What do you think," she said, "Holcomb came to the house to call, and delighted everybody with his spirits and his voice. He is a regular visitor there now, and he has written a comic opera — think of that — Mexican or something, full of the most delightful chirrup. He taught me the 'Bandits' Chorus,' for I couldn't get the melody out of my head. It goes like this, — wait till I show you," and she lit on the piano stool and began to play and sing a chorus.

" 'We're vaqueros in the Summer,
And torredos in the Fall,
And caveleros gayly when we sing.
We have soft Castilian names
And we play at parlor games,
But we're very nasty bandits in the Spring.' "

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF

"Isn't it jolly? You should hear Holcomb sing it with a sombrero on."

Mother wanted to know what it meant, and John's ear, which was not of the best, failed to catch what Lucy called the swing of it, which would have piqued her if she had not been self-set on amiability, for there is really something discouraging in having a husband who does not exult in a pretty woman's bravado and saucy declaration that she is a very nasty bandit in the spring.

"Oh, well, dear," she said, jumping up with the same alacrity, "you don't care for music, do you, and you want to talk to me about the cistern, don't you?"

"I should like to have you go over the accounts with me," said John. "I want to show you just where we stand, what has been done, and what we are to expect."

"Oh, give me a breathing spell, dear! Everything is going all right, I am sure. The place looks just lovely, and it's going to be beautiful when it's finished, and I suppose it will be finished sometime, John. That reminds me, we ought to have the house heated by steam — you don't know how convenient it is."

When Tilka put before her at breakfast some fresh mushrooms on toast, her astonishment was great. "Why, where did you get the champignons? Kate sent all over town for some, and when she got them the cook spoiled them. Aren't they lovely?"

"Mart raises them in the stable," said John,

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"in an escritoire, and therefore they ought to be French, but they are not. They are solid American mushrooms."

"Kate had so much trouble with her cook that she discharged her."

"And did the cooking herself, I suppose," added John.

"Oh, no, she abolished the cooking too!"

"Abolished it? How about the eating? She didn't abolish that, did she, with Holcomb coming there regularly?"

"Had the food sent in," said Lucy. "It's altogether more convenient and less mussy. Kate couldn't stand the smells from the kitchen. I think it affected her neuralgia. Think of the worry and fuss we got rid of. When it comes time to eat, she says, 'Shall we go out, or have it sent in?' and if one don't feel like dressing, it's an awful convenience. You just ring the call and write out your order."

"That's a great advantage," said John. "You never know what it costs till it's too late to correct it. I suppose Kate thinks it is one of the modern conveniences, like Cramp."

"Why, what do you mean, John?"

"I mean," replied John, "that our mushrooms have no bills behind them, or sick headaches. They are the common American kind, and won't keep you awake nights, so they are not a modern convenience."

"How preachy he is getting to be, isn't he, Mother?"

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF

"I suppose," said Mother, "that Kate buys all her preserves ready put up at the store." She said this with well-guarded disdain for such a proceeding.

"Preserves — gracious, no. I don't think city people care for them. She keeps rillettes and pâtés in the house for a quick tiffin — John, we must lay in some rillettes, they're delicious and so convenient if anybody drops in. Only twenty-five cents a can — you know rillettes?"

"Never heard of them," said John. "Do they grow on bushes or in drills?"

"How ridiculous you are!"

"Ain't I?" responded John, submerging his grammar in his other ignorance. "Do you know, if I keep on at these homely improvements long enough, that I will get to believe that ordinary sagacity grows on shrubs and can be picked by the quart. I suppose I'll have to go down to the Astor House Rotunda and get some fresh ideas about life."

Then Lucy let off such a roulade of genuine laughter that John, despite his unsympathetic ear, fell into the refrain of it with a weak smile.

When, a day or two later, Lucy went away, she hugged and kissed Harold, and said to John with a little extra effusiveness before she left him, "Now, do hurry up, dear, and get things to rights so that we can invite our friends."

And this sounded to John, after she had gone, very much as if she would bring Holcomb with her when she came back.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

Then the late drouth set in. John could not quite divest himself of the notion that it was in some way associated with the absence of his wife. She had taken all the humidity with her. He had to acknowledge to Mother that it would be some relief to hear her sing that absurd "Bandits' Chorus" in the evening.

What was his surprise to hear Mother say: "John, I wouldn't worry if I were you. Girls have to learn some things as well as men. It's best to have them go away and learn them as soon as possible. They are generally more comfortable afterwards."

"What things?" asked John.

"Well," replied Mother, as she held out a spoonful of grape jelly to cool before tasting it, "one of them is that everything that glitters ain't gold, and sometimes not even good gilt. Lucy was always pretty quick with her lessons, but she had to have 'em put before her. You just go on and have patience."

This sounded slightly oracular, and John wondered if a mother might not have some advantage of him in her knowledge of Lucy's character.

"The city is a great temptation to a young and lively woman like Lucy," he said tentatively.

"So it is," said Mother, "but temptations are the best kind of lessons, after all, when a young woman has had the right bringing up. Lucy will get her dose of it, and come back to her milk like a good cat—and speaking of cats, John, you never brought me up those condition powders

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF

for Medusa. The poor thing tries to drink her milk, but it goes against her."

Whatever encouragement the Mother had intended to convey was thus neutralized unintentionally by the cat. Not long after, when John walked out of his shop to take an inspiring look at his pile of lumber, he found the bull terrier fastened to a staple by a three-foot chain, drawn out to its extreme length as the dog tried to get at the cat, that had sat down just a foot beyond its reach, and glared with the disdain of composure at the terrier's endeavours to get at her. That was the superior feline opinion of the dog, the chain, Sprague, and the master's provision. Mart, who was leaning on the window-sill of the stable watching the two brutes, informed John complacently that the cat came every day and sat down just a foot beyond the reach of the chain with unperturbed defiance, and when the terrier made a leap for her and was brought up with a cruel jerk, the cat never turned a hair, but seemed to ask, with profound placidity, how his neck felt.

"It's all right," said Mart. "When she has made up her mind that it's perfectly safe, I'll loosen the staple. I wanted to speak to you, sir, about the garden. You've been so busy lately that you haven't thought much about it."

"There's nothing the matter with the garden, is there?"

"Nothing in particular, sir, only I can't keep up with it. I thought you'd like to see how your waterworks come out. S'pose you walk down the

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

slope to the melons." John followed him down through the overgrown garden paths, and let him do most of the talking. As they stood on the edge of the last terrace, Mart said: "Fields pretty gray on either side, sir. Look at them tomat-tusses, sir—early Freedoms. There's only twelve bushes, but they're dandies." He plucked one and handed it to John. "That's good enough for a prize," said he. "I thought you'd like to see whether the waterworks paid."

John sat down on the edge of the terrace and dandled the big tomato admiringly. Mart continued: "You told me to get rid of all the stuff we could not use, and I've sold two bushels of them."

"You don't say so."

"Yes, sir. S'pose you step down and look at the Delmonico melons. There was enough for five families, so I got rid of all we couldn't use."

"Sold 'em?"

"Yes. I wanted to speak to you about it, but you were so busy with your house that I didn't like to bother you. There's the account, sir," and Mart pulled out a little book and handed it to John, who ran his eye down the following list:

100 melons	\$5.00
2 bushels tomatoes	3.00
8 quarts lima beans . . . . .	.80
2 bushels early potatoes	3.00
30 bunches early onions	1.25
40 quarts blackberries	3.20
100 cucumbers	1.00
<hr/>	
<i>Amount carried forward</i>	<i>\$17.25</i>

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF

<i>Amount brought from preceding page</i>	<i>\$17.25</i>
40 bunches white Milan turnips	1.00
45 bunches lettuce	2.20
20 bunches beets	1.00
10 cabbages . . . . .	.40
20 cauliflowers	2.00
100 sweet corn	2.00
2 pecks butter beans . . . . .	.50
25 summer squashes	1.20
25 egg plants	2.50
1 quart sweet peppers . . . . .	.20
20 bunches radishes . . . . .	.60
Total	<u>\$30.85</u>

"A man would never get rich on market gardening, Mart," said John.

"Well, sir," replied Mart, a little resentfully, "there's a good many ways of gettin' a livin' that ain't so profitable in the end. I'll get twenty dollars more out of that garden before the frost hurts it, and then there's a good row of celery started that you can't eat even if you have that city chap with you. Considerin' that there wasn't much done to the garden, and you've been livin' off it for three months, and I'll have a pretty good cellar full of stuff for the winter, it seems to me that it's a fine showin' of what you could do with it if you give it some attention. There ain't anybody round here has got such tomattusses as them, sir, and we might just as well hed ten bushels as two to sell, when we got that water in. Everybody's tomattusses were burnt up two weeks ago, and Pop Swarthout, he's pullin' water from the brook to do his washin'."

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"And how much do you calculate you can get out of the garden next year — if you have your own way?"

"Well, I ain't settin' no figures, Mr. Dennison. But you can see for yourself what it's been doin', and what it might have done if I hadn't given so much time to other things. I s'pose you'll be through buildin' next season?"

"I hope so," said John, laughing.

"Well, sir, if you don't mind takin' a bit of advice, I'd invest that fifty dollars in fertilizer this fall, and, take my word for it, it will turn you up seventy-five per cent for the investment, and mebbe a hundred. Why, sir, there's a hundred dollars a year in them berries if they was cut out and doubled up."

"Mart," said John, "your mushrooms were a great success this morning at breakfast. It must have taken you a good while to bring them about."

"Not at all, sir. It didn't take fifteen minutes' work. If you'll step up to the stable I'll show you."

And true enough, when they got there, Mart went up to the old bureau that he had bought at the auction, and pulled out one of the drawers. It disclosed a bed of mushrooms thickly growing over its whole surface.

"I just put in a few shovelsful of manure and soil in each drawer, sowed a little spawn, and there you are. They like the dark, sir, and I calculate there's a breakfast in each drawer for some time to come. Lord, sir, you couldn't eat all the

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF

mushrooms that bureau will produce. I used to keep a piece of furniture like that in my cellar before I came to this country. It was meat and vegetables."

"Mart," said John, reflectively, "let me tell you what I wish you'd do. Just make up a basketful of the best things you've got in the garden, and put some of the mushrooms on top. I'd like to send a basketful down to my friends in the city. I think it would surprise them."

Acting on this suggestion, they filled a basket with the best of their produce — melons, cucumbers, cauliflower, lettuce, egg plant, tomatoes, and mushrooms, and they both regarded it with genuine pride. When John went to the city he took it with him, and sent it up by messenger to Wesley's establishment, with a card in it simply inscribed, "From the Homestead."

"That will open their eyes," said Mart. "City people don't get such fresh stuff as that, I'll be bound." To which John merely replied, "Yes, that ought to make Mrs. Dennison homesick."

The September drouth was upon them when Mr. Ridabok announced that he was ready to take the roof off. The country was lying sear and arid. The little river at the foot of the hill had shrunk to a rivulet. The roads everywhere were powdery and stifling, and the bordering trees and hedgerows were ashen with the dust. Most of the wells in the neighbourhood had given out, and nature was staggering with a prolonged thirst.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"We'll get a couple of weeks of this," said Mr. Ridabok, "and we'll make those shingles fly before it rains."

He picked up two farm hands who could shingle, and with John's and Mart's assistance there was quite a gang of lively workmen one morning hard at it when Sprague and May Brad-dock stopped in the pony phaeton to admire the scene, and Sprague, standing up in the vehicle, shouted, "Lovely! lovely!"

John now began to taste some of the rewards of his persistence and foresight. Mr. Swarthout came and looked over the stone fence in his shirt sleeves, with a real interest in the work and a persistent ignoring of the only garden in the neighbourhood that was not burnt up. He had been known to remark that people who eat muskmelons and mushrooms for breakfast are, as a rule, "foolin' with their innards." He did not say that slapjacks and rye coffee were the original paradisaical regimen, but there was a large and self-satisfied intimation of that sort in his face.

That week of arduous work was long remembered by John, less on account of its stress than on account of its zest and animation. There were many surprises in it and some little setbacks, but in spite of all, the doing was like a merrymaking. It is true, the chimneys had to be built up four feet to accommodate the new pitch of the roof, and Mr. Ridabok had overlooked this in his calculations, a little omission that

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF

added thirty-five dollars to the original estimate. Then, too, the cypress shingles had to be changed for stained shingles, when John began to realize how raw that new roof would look on those old walls; but the celerity with which the external transformation was effected under his eye, made him blindly buoyant, and he worked untiringly with an ardour that he often thought of afterwards, as he asked himself what he had been doing with all his spare time before this task was undertaken.

More than anything else the newly discovered friendliness of his neighbours helped him out. As soon as Mr. Swarthout understood the exigency of the case, he brought his team and man over and offered to do all the hauling, and another neighbour who was passing came in and lent a hand. This kind of assistance was the usual thing among these people. It seemed to be the remains of an old custom of house-raising; and as Mr. Ridabok had everything ready to fit into its place, it was not long before the new sky-line of the improved house rose up with fresh dignity among the trees, and John saw his dream emerge from the paper and lift itself with new pride before his eyes.

"Now, then," said Mr. Ridabok, "if we can get the sash in on that bay while this weather lasts, I kalkerlate you'll be all hunky dory. I'll have the deck on that bay day after to-morrow, and if you could have the glass into them sash all ready, that room will be tight and ready to

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

use. It won't take long to put a coat of priming on."

Then John became a glazier. He took a few instructions from Mr. Ridabok how to spring in the glass with a chisel and how to use a putty knife, and when he had the hang of it he worked with much lightness of heart in his shop long after the lights were out in the house.

During this week of hard work John's mother-in-law rose to quiet heights of patient endurance that elicited his unbounded respect. Mrs. Swarthout had invited her to come over with the boy and stay at the farmhouse till the roof was on; but Mother stuck to the ship, sleeping now on the lounge, now on chairs, and even on the floor, going from room to room as the work exposed apartment after apartment, keeping an equable temper, and looking after the household duties with an unperturbed patience, so that John slowly began to forgive her even the cat.

But just as he had reached this reasonable condition, an accident occurred that came like an evil omen and filled him with self-reproaches. He was working away at his frames when an unearthly scream startled him. He rushed out upon the grass and saw in a flash what had occurred.

Mart had loosened the staple.

The bull terrier had Medusa by the throat, and was giving her the final shake as John came up. He was too late. The cat-inquiries as to how the dog's neck felt were hushed forever, for its own neck was broken; and there was Mart

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF

leaning on the window-sill of the stable contemplating the disaster as coolly as if he had long contemplated it.

John picked the dead animal up, carried it into the stable, and laid it tenderly on the feed-box.

"Go and chain that dog up," he said to Mart with a gruffness he had never before used.

Fortunately Lucy's mother was at that moment over at the Swarthout house; but in spite of her ignorance of the affair, John felt an unexpected twinge of compunction in having thus requited her for her faithfulness.

In spite of himself and the noisy assurance of a robin that the deed was all right and proper, it looked to him like a stroke of ill luck.

Have you never noticed that as soon as a man admits this superstitious notion, something turns up to corroborate it?

John walked to the house moodily, and just as he reached the door a telegram from the city was put into his hand, and this is what it said:—

"Lucy sick. Come at once.

"KATE."





CHAPTER X

RECOMPENSE

IN the rush and strain of endeavour, directed mainly to the materials about him, John had not found time or disposition to think of the inevitable and unexpected. The news so sudden and out of all relation to his thoughts, and withal so vaguely full of dire possibilities, was in effect a blow, that one might say had been delivered by an unseen hand, and was cruelly disturbing.

He went flying to the city in the evening, eager and apprehensive, and fast as he flew his fears kept ahead of him, for in such crises the mind jumps ahead of railroads and telegraphs to all kinds of ominous conclusions. The possibility of having his wife taken out of the scheme of preparation had never occurred to him, and the mere thought of it suddenly threw an air of futility over all that he had been doing. Could it be possible that his projects and his efforts could suddenly

RECOMPENSE

be struck with devastation and tumbled into dust?

He never remembered arriving in the city. All the usual circumstances of a journey were whelmed and obliterated in an impatient anxiety. He reached the house of his friend about nine o'clock in the evening, and going precipitately up the steps, rang the bell with a summoning vigour. When the door was opened by the maid, the sound of a piano and the voice of a man singing, together with a little burst of laughter, greeted him. Without any regard to the formalities, he said: "I am Mr. Dennison. Where is Mrs. Dennison?" The girl looked at him, a little surprised at his eagerness, and as she stepped back Kate Ellis appeared in the hall, seemingly blown there by a gust of laughter, and greeting him with surprising unconcern, said: "Oh, is that you, Mr. Dennison? You got my telegram."

"How is Lucy?" asked John, waiving aside all else that was ceremonious, and making it sound very much as if he had said, "Am I too late?"

"Lucy has just gone upstairs to lie down a few moments," Kate replied smilingly. "She'll be delighted to know that you came so promptly."

"Can I see her?"

"I wouldn't disturb her for a while. Let her get a little rest. Come into the dining room. Holcomb is here and is singing. Wes will be glad to see you."

Before John was well aware of it, he found himself in a large room where there was a group of

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

persons enjoying Mr. Holcomb's music. They saluted John heartily, and Wesley, in a dress coat and smoking a cigar, cried out: "By Jove, here's our exemplary rustic, just in time to hear your ballad of 'The Perambulating Potato Bug,' Holcomb. Have a cigar, old fellow, and make yourself at home. This is the doctor. Dr. Chink, Mr. Dennison."

"Have you been attending my wife, doctor?" asked John.

"Yes," replied the doctor, keeping half of his attention on Holcomb, and looking as if he were in the casual habit of attending everybody. "Lady's nervous system badly shaken up; miasm, you know. We're going to send her to the seashore."

"It's the penalty of living in the country," said Wesley, cheerfully, and offering John a cigar.

A little later he found Lucy reclining upon a bed in an evening dress very much unloosed. The moment she saw him, she exclaimed languidly: "Oh, how good you were to come, John. I hope Kate didn't scare you. What did the telegram say?"

"Here it is," replied John. "It says, 'Lucy sick; come at once.' It was so imperative that I thought of bringing an undertaker with me."

"Isn't that just like Kate? And were you really scared?"

John pulled a chair up to the bed. "What is the matter with you, my poor girl?" he said, mingling solicitude with some reproach.

"Oh, I'll be all right in a few moments," said

RECOMPENSE

Lucy, "if you will not make me more nervous. Now that you are here you can stay down a couple of days, can't you? How's the cistern and everything? Listen — Holcomb is singing. I think I'll get up and go down."

"You will have to excuse me, my dear," said John. "I did not come to New York post haste to hear Holcomb sing. I thought you were dying."

"And now you are disappointed because I am not."

John felt grim, and may have betrayed a little more of his condition than he intended.

"You will dress yourself for travelling, my dear. I am going to take you back with me to-night. There is a late train, and Mart will have a carriage waiting for us. If you are going to die suddenly, I think it will be better to have you under my eye and your mother's."

"How absurd you can be. Do you suppose I could get myself ready in an hour, and at this time of night? What would Kate think of such nonsense?"

"I haven't considered what Kate would think. You cannot wear that dress, I suppose."

"Can't I? What do you know about it? Suppose you hook me up while you are here. I want you to hear Holcomb's song. Kate would never consent to my going away in this idiotic manner."

"Kate's consent isn't at all necessary, I assure you, my dear."

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"Oh, well, you needn't pull at me as if I was made of wood. I think Kate would have hysterics if she should come in now, and see you treating your wife as if she were a bay-window or a work bench. Why don't you go gently and hook me up?"

"My dear, the dress will not meet. It doesn't fit you. Wouldn't it be possible to travel without its being hooked? You'll wear something over it, of course."

"What nonsense. All it needs is firmness and gentleness."

"There you are. I should think it would cut you in two. Where are your heavy shoes?"

"I never wear them in the evening—you know that as well as I do. They are in the trunk in the closet."

John got them out. "If you will sit down, I will lace them up for you. The idea of travelling in such a thing as that," he added, as he took off one of her little slippers and held it up, not without a passing admiration.

"I never travelled in them," said Lucy, "but I suppose I should have to if I depended on you to lace up my shoes for me. Don't you see that I cannot lace my own shoes as nimbly as I once did? You never will realize that I am getting old, will you?"

"I have laced one of them," said John.

"Well, I never knew it—it wobbles so. What do you suppose Kate will say if she sees me with these shoes on at this time of night?"

RECOMPENSE

What a blessing it is, John, that we do not have men maid-servants. They would have everything as loose as they are themselves. I suppose you showed the telegram to mother, and she will not sleep a wink till I get back."

"She wasn't half as much worried as I was. You see, she has known you longer. Do these things go in your trunk?"

"No; everything of mine is in the trunk. You do not suppose that I can travel with my hair in this condition? Suppose I should faint on the train."

"And no Holcomb about," said John. "Well, that would be tedious. But I'll promise not to throw any cold water on you till you get home. Where's your hat?"

He looked at his watch. "We've got half an hour," he said; "just time to faint before we start."

"Then I'd have to be all unhooked again. You see, men have no practical sense of details."

"I have. Are these things to go into your satchel?"

"No, goose. My satchel is all packed."

"For the seashore, I suppose."

"No," said Lucy. "I packed it so as to go home with you when you came. I suppose you thought that you were doing this thing, dear, all by your manly self, didn't you?"

Half an hour later they had slipped quietly away, without disturbing the revelry in the dining-room, Kate alone saying good-by with

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

an unmistakable air of commiseration, and, Lucy thought, with just the least bit of relief.

There was something novel and piquant in the night journey, removed as it was from the rush and roar of the day's work. Even the prosaic sail on the late ferry-boat was unexpectedly delightful, unaccompanied as it was by the commerce and clash of the earlier hours. The river was moonlit, and the city, with its halo of artificial lights, seemed to be sinking away behind them as they drifted out into the cool, inviting night. There were very few passengers on the late train, and those that were, together with the conductor and trainmen, wore a new aspect of pleasantness and amiability, as if at that hour it was not necessary to keep up the official hardness of the day. Sitting at the open window, with the fragrant night air laving her as if she were in a bath, Lucy gave way to a luxurious fantasy. The lights of the stations came regularly and softly out of the shadows in a dreamful dance. The vistas of moonlit pastures and dewy uplands, with glimpses of silvery reposeful waters, lit here and there with twinkling lights—all seemed to be very far away from Holcomb and his music.

"How dreamful and eerie it all is," said Lucy. "If I must travel, I shall always want to travel at night, when all the disturbing people have gone away. There is some kind of fascination in plunging through the night when one leaves the world behind."

RECOMPENSE

"Yes," said John, "I suppose most women do like to plunge a little at night."

"Oh, but they get over it, John. They have to, if they get husbands who lace them up — though I must say they do it very feebly. Do you know it's real jolly to have a big, solemn husband who is a retriever, and knows how to bring things home?"

"But, my dear, the jollity of it consists in having a home to which you can bring things. Though I suppose some kind of things would come back of their own accord when they got tired."

"It's very good of you to think that, and yet, I suppose most of us would prefer to have a big, hulking husband bring us back. Gracious, we must be running through a garden — do you smell the pinks?"

"And you really were getting tired of it, were you not?" said John.

"I'll tell you all about it when I get my things off. Is this our station?"

"Yes, and there's Mart waiting for us with a rig."

When they arrived at the house it was nearly midnight. The moon hung low in the west, and the old stone structure was outlined clearly and somewhat imposingly against the sky, as Lucy stopped at the gate a moment and surveyed its new outlines. A feeble light was glimmering in one of the windows, and a whip-poor-will was calling shrilly somewhere.

"It doesn't look like the same house, John," she said.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"It isn't — now that you've come back. I guess you are not the same woman; that's it."

John was looking with admiration at his improved edifice that seemed to rise up with unexpected dignity out of the dusks, and he wanted to explain it, but Lucy cut him short by saying: "I wonder if we can get anything to eat. I'm awfully hungry."

"Sure," replied John, with proprietary confidence. "We'll slip in without disturbing anybody, and while you are taking your things off I'll rummage. I never knew a sick woman to have such an appetite."

"It is strange," said Lucy. "I wonder if Tilka keeps the milk cool."

And then, like two truants, they stole into their own abode stealthily, with much suppressed enjoyment at their precaution, and John, with a lamp in his hand, went softly into the cellar to reconnoitre, while his wife unloosened in the new bay. When she came tiptoeing in search of him, she heard him bumping around under the flooring, and had to go to the cellar stairway and call down in a stage whisper: —

"Shall I come down and help you?"

"No," came the voice of John from beneath; "if you are unloosed, sit down, and don't make a noise, or we'll have the whole family on us. There's cold milk and cider, and — how would you like one of Tilka's cold bottles of beer?"

"Oh, John," said Lucy, "if you only would."

"All right. There's a pan of mushrooms, and

RECOMPENSE

pot-cheese, and cold corned-beef, and apple pie, and — Jerusalem —”

“What’s the matter?”

“There’s the tray of cold chicken.” Crash.

“Oh, heavens,” said Lucy, “what have you done?”

“I’ve upset the mushrooms. Most of them have gone into the pan of milk.”

“Mercy, you haven’t broken the beer bottle?”

“No, that is safe. You’ll have to come down and carry the light for me.”

When they were coming up the cellar stairway single file, and acting altogether like burglars, Lucy had to sit down on the step and relieve herself by a good laugh.

“It’s such fun,” she said, “to steal your own things. If mother should see us, what would she think?”

“Mother is all right,” said John, “and if you do not want Tilka to catch us, you will have to hurry. She’ll be stirring at daybreak.”

When they were seated at the table, Lucy thought it was nicer than the Waldorf.

“Of course it is,” said John. “You can’t unhook yourself at the Waldorf, and, besides, you have to tip the waiter.”

“Oh, we can tip the waiter,” said Lucy; “that’s easy, and we might as well keep up the custom.” Whereupon she gave John a kiss, and then remarked, “Now do open the beer before you do anything else.”

John made a great flourish in the operation,

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

but he was regarding his wife with occasional curious side glances. Something in her manner baffled him a little. He had never before known her to drink beer, although he had often placed it before her and assured her it would do her good. Nor had she ever been inclined at all to exult in late hours as she was now doing. He did not quite see why an invalid, who, according to her own account, was liable to faint at any moment, should exhibit such a nocturnal appetite and show such a disposition to defy the conventional. Nevertheless she was eating a slice of bread and chicken quite voraciously, and drank off the beer like a veteran. There was no use denying that it had a robust charm that was unusual, and as she saw him regarding her with a little wonder, she said:—

“I suppose you think I am quite reckless.”

“I was trying,” replied John, “to reconcile it with the telegram.”

“It must be Bohemianism, John,” said Lucy, “and I suppose a Bohemian can have spells, can’t he? You have no idea how it broadens and liberalizes a woman to go out into the world and see how other people do it.”

“Yes, I have,” said John, rather solemnly. “You must have seen a great deal of the world in a week or two.”

“Quite enough, John. They scared me a little when I came to understand it, and as I couldn’t be a Bohemian in their style, I felt that when I got back here it would be quite safe with you around to break out a little. You are not sleepy, are you?”

RECOMPENSE

“Not a bit.”

“Then let me tell you. Wes is so unlike you, John. You know what I mean. In the first place, he’s handsome. Oh, there’s no use in our denying that. He wears a dress coat as if he was born in it. Of course it’s absurd to speak of a man being born in a dress coat, but Kate always insists that he was born in society, which is pretty much the same thing. You can’t help admiring a man, John, who looks so well in a dress coat that he hardly ever takes it off, except in a bath-room after he has locked the door. Are you interested?”

“Yes; take some more of the chicken and go on.”

“It makes a man so superior to the drudgery of thinking. Kate says that he is a young Napoleon, and her idea of a young Napoleon is a man who makes everybody else do the walking. He doesn’t have to worry or drudge or pay bills.”

“How does he manage it?”

“Well, it’s the most extraordinary thing in the world — he lets the other fellow pay them. Kate says it would interfere with the gayety if he paid them. Can you understand that?”

“Clearly nothing can be plainer. But when a man and wife go into that kind of partnership it is always marked ‘Limited.’”

“The furniture in that house, John, cost three thousand dollars. It was to be paid for by the month, and Cramp managed it. Just before I came up the collector came, and it seems there

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

hadn't been anything paid. Kate was quite confidential with me, and told me what Cramp said. 'Oh, let them take the furniture back,' said he; 'you've had the use of it, and now you're going to Long Branch. You can always get a fresh supply when you come back.' Now I call that gay, John, but—what I wanted to tell you was that Kate and I fell out—and that was the reason why she sent the telegram. Holcomb brought a comic-opera singer one night, and Kate said that I wasn't to mind if she smoked cigarettes after she sang, because it was the custom, and cigarettes burned away foolish barriers. Oh, Kate can say clever things when she is in full dress."

"And you helped to burn away the barriers because it was clever?"

"No, I didn't."

"Didn't you learn to drink beer?"

"Beer? I never saw it in the house. It was champagne twice a day. Kate takes a champagne cocktail before breakfast. 'What's a pint bottle among one?' said she. 'Besides, it clears the complexion.' Beer, indeed! Let me see—where was I? Oh, yes: Kate and I fell out. It's too ridiculous, but I think we really hate each other in the bottom of our hearts. You never could guess what caused it."

"Why, the champagne and cigarette; they always do, or perhaps it was Holcomb."

"Oh, you might as well give it up. I got sick—seriously sick, John—and it made Kate indignant. She said it shocked her."

RECOMPENSE

"Well, you probably informed her of it by telegram as you did me."

"No; I told her confidentially."

"Well," said John, "I was informed confidentially myself, and she couldn't be more shocked than I was. I was that upset by the telegram that I must have acted foolishly. I thought of course you must be dying. Your mother stood over there by the door. She was looking for Medusa when I read the telegram to her, and I said, 'Well, mother, I suppose we must make up our minds that there is to be one less of our happy little group.'"

Lucy, who had her elbows on the table, let her head drop between her hands and gurgled a little as she said: "Yes, that's just like you, John, and I know exactly what mother said in reply. She turned and looked at you over her spectacles, you stupid old goose, and said: 'One less? Oh, I guess not; more likely to be one more.'"

John was staring at Lucy with a mixed expression of surprise and tenderness. "No," he said; "she didn't say that."

"Well, then it was because she thought it was superfluous."

It was two o'clock in the morning when this platitudinous pair of ordinary persons exhausted themselves and retired, each promising the other that, as it was 'Liberty Hall,' no one could interfere with the morning sleep. And yet, such is the crassness of human nature in ordinary persons that Lucy was up at eight o'clock looking through

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

the vines at the glory of the morning, and saying to herself, "I kept John up so late, I'll not disturb him for an hour or two;" and there was John out under the trees with Harold, saying to himself, "The poor girl was up so late, we mustn't disturb her, my boy, for two hours."

When they came to breakfast Tilka announced in one of her privileged asides: "I think we make some disturbances in the cellar when it was last night. Gott in Himmel, I must that skim the mushrooms off the milk before I can the cream take up."

That Sabbath morning was never quite forgotten by John and Lucy. There were many other Sabbath mornings just as calm and brilliant, but they were reminders, not surprises. John walked down to the meadow with his arm about his wife. They looked from the kitchen window, as if they were giving an extra artistic touch to the landscape, so that Tilka said to herself as she looked out: "I guess they make some love-talk in the garden."

They sat down under the trees, John showing a reticent tenderness and solicitude in little actions that Lucy seemed to invite. The still air carried the vibration of a distant church bell. The white clouds sailed over lazily, like argosies of snow on oceans of blue. The gurgle of the waters was muted into a mellow chant. The steady breath of the western breeze stirred the autumnal foliage into a long-drawn sigh, and there in the cloister of the woods, I dare say, Lucy regarded her husband for the time being as a father confessor.

RECOMPENSE

"I think," she said, "it would be better to have life all Sundays than all hey-days. I could almost preach a sermon this morning with the atmosphere for a text."

"Let the atmosphere preach it," said John, with much consideration.

"Yes," said Lucy; "I suppose we are in the choir, not in the pulpit."

"It's a long time ago, my dear," said John, "but do you remember Herbert's lines that you quoted to me on the Holyoke hills one morning when you wore blue ribbons?"

"Indeed, I do," said Lucy.

"O day most calm, most bright,
The fruit of this, the next world's bud."

There you are."

"And is it just as bright now?"

"Brighter," said Lucy.

"But it sounds a little like the tone of that far-away bell, doesn't it?"

"No, it doesn't. It sounds very practical and near by. What a lot you have done. How surprised Sprague will be when he sees the house."

"Why, he and May Braddock drive up twice a week to look at it. They have watched every nail that was driven. I think they intend to build, themselves."

"You don't say so. I suppose May Braddock wants a place to store her old furniture in."

"Sprague asked me the other day what I would take for the place as it stands."

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"I like his impudence," said Lucy. "What did you tell him?"

"I told him I would consult you. We could get a good advance on the property now, and then we could take a high-stoop house in the city. I thought I'd speak to you about it."

"I guess they can build their own house. May Braddock needn't think she can step into my bay and put her old lumber in my bedroom and dig up all my flowers and pull down my vines. What have I been working for, I should like to know?"

"I told her that I didn't think you would like to see all your work go into the hands of somebody else."

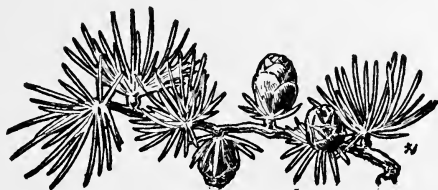
"I should think not. There isn't another house in the county with a bay like that, John, and when a woman realizes her ideal, it makes her weary to have somebody come along and ask what she'll take for it. Why, I intend it for a conservatory. You wait till you see my flowers in it and the fireplace fixed. That reminds me, John; I've got a picture of a fireplace I want to show you. I cut it out of one of the illustrated papers. It's too lovely for anything. Have you thought much about the fireplace, John? You know everything depends on a colonial fireplace in a house like ours; a tiled hearth—glazed tiles, you know—they shine so when there's a wood fire, and shine is absolutely necessary on a bleak night, especially when there are no bright people present; and brass tongs and shovel—what do

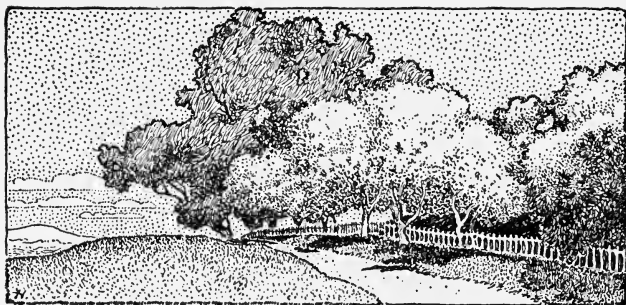
RECOMPENSE

they have a shovel for, John? You can't shovel the wood."

"Oh, it's to shovel the cinders back off the rug when the night is bleak," said John, laughing.

"Then there's a broad mantel high up, so high you have to stand on a chair to reach it; and there must be two guns crossed over it—old guns—and some nice chipped willow-ware platters set out, and a crane. When we hang the crane, John—have you thought about hanging the crane? It's really important, my dear; it must have an old black iron tea-kettle with a hinged lid that jumps up and down while you are talking. Suppose we go up to the house. I want to show you how I've planned it."





CHAPTER XI

WINTER'S WARNINGS AND DISCOMFORTS

THE season was going. Presently it would be winter. "Winter up here," Lucy said, as she stood upon her terrace on a bright autumn morning, with the wind softly rustling her dress and the panorama of change spreading itself out in russets and duns. In her mind she saw the fields buried in drifts, and the house banked up with snow. The world of human contact would be cut off. She hesitated a moment — she could hear the hammer of Mr. Ridabok, who was tinkering away, laying the flooring of the front porch. Mart, who had been to the depot with John, drove in as she stood there. She called to him a little impatiently.

"I want you to help me fix the fireplace this morning."

He pulled up his horse and thought a moment. "The potatoes," he said, "I hev to get 'em in."

WINTER'S WARNINGS

"Potatoes?" she repeated. "Must they come in?"

"Well, it would be a pity to lose 'em — they're so fine. There's six barrels of 'em."

After a few more words with him she went back to the house, stopping to admire the bay window as usual, and coming round in front, where Mr. Ridabok was driving the narrow boards of the flooring together with a sledge. She was about to ask him if he couldn't come in and help her with the fireplace, when the dainty aspect of the little veranda appealed to her, and she exclaimed, "Oh, isn't that going to look pretty!"

Mr. Ridabok, who did not stop pounding, merely said: "Yes'm — that will look quite ship-shape when it's done. But it ought to be painted as fast as I lay it. Them boards will spring if they get wet."

"Can't I paint them?" asked Lucy. "Where's the paint? I know something about painting."

Mr. Ridabok smiled. "I wouldn't start in on it if I was you. There's a good many square feet, and it's all hard rubbin' on your hands and knees with a pound brush."

Lucy then went around to the kitchen and found her mother and Tilka so busy that they hardly had time to talk to her.

"Can't I help you?" she said. "It seems to me that everybody opposes my doing anything."

"We are moving the things out of the store closet into the cellar," said her mother. "I don't think they will keep so well up here."

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

"Let me help you."

"You just sit down and let Tilka run up and down stairs. I guess we are pretty much through."

Instead of obeying her mother, Lucy picked up the candle and followed Tilka, who had her arms full of jars, down the cellar stairs, and was presently followed by the old lady herself.

There were three hanging shelves in the cellar, and they presented an array of jars and bottles that was imposing, and to which Tilka was carefully adding. Lucy looked at the store with wonder, and exclaimed: "Good gracious, what a collection! I don't believe you know what you've got."

"Oh, yes, I do," replied her mother. "Hold the candle." And she began to read from her list: "Three dozen tomatoes, two dozen succotash, one dozen string beans, one dozen sweet corn, two dozen sweet pickles, two dozen currant jelly, one dozen blackberry jam, one dozen tomato catsup, one dozen chow-chow, two dozen cherries ——"

"Oh, stop, mother."

"I think you could buy them not so good at the store," said Tilka.

"You go right up out of this damp cellar before you catch your death of cold," said her mother.

When John came home in the evening, he brought a friend with him, a young man who carried a little satchel with tools in it. John said, as he introduced him to the family, that

WINTER'S WARNINGS

he was going to fix the fireplace in a friendly way, and take a day in the country. But when the workman came to look at the fireplace, he said the floor would have to come up first. It had to have new headers in, and he must work out to them, so that the carpenter could lay the woodwork up to the tiling and put a sill around the hearth.

This meant more discouraging ruction, and sure enough the next morning Mr. Ridabok and Mart and the visitor pushed all the things out of the room and went to work with crow-bars, ripping up the old plank, and knocking little white spots in the wall paper, at each one of which Lucy gave a little gasp, as she stared in at the bay window upon the black chasm of the cellar and felt that the bottom of the house had fallen out.

But she watched the workman afterwards as he worked at the fireplace, and felt that there was some fascination in it. She saw the tiles slip into their places, and the hearth and fireplace opening grow into decorative beauty. Even the dusky figures of her mother and Tilka, moving about in the gloom of the cellar, covering up their preserve jars with stout paper, did not draw her attention from her fireplace. She was astonished at the ease and celerity with which the work was accomplished, and when at last they permitted her to stand upon the new flooring, it was a delight to move about on it, so level and smooth and firm was it.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

Then it had to be stained, and for two nights she and John were down on their knees with a pot of varnish and a kerosene lamp, making play of the work. It looked very fine when it was done.

"It just matches the brickwork, doesn't it?" said Lucy.

"Do you know what the painter would have charged me to do it? Eleven dollars he wanted. Do you know what it cost us? Just one dollar and forty cents, and it looks like mahogany."

"Oh, there was never any mahogany in the world as handsome as that. But I've got it all over my white dress."

Mother and Tilka looked at it when the furniture was moved in again, and decided vital points at issue, such as, would the big easy chair look better in the corner or set in the middle of the room, and how would the couch look set askew.

It was mother's privilege to modify the enthusiasm a little with her grave experience. "Fireplaces," said she, "have got to be part of the furniture nowadays. When I was a girl, they had to heat the house, and when they did, people didn't have such bay windows as that to let in the cold."

"Oh," said Lucy, clapping her hands, "now I know, John, why they never built bay windows in Massachusetts in old times."

"Yes," continued mother, "when we sot round a fireplace like that, we always wore our shawls to keep our backs warm. I guess if we'd had bay windows like that, we'd had to wear our furs."

WINTER'S WARNINGS

"Oh, that was before you had double sashes," said John. "I'll make that bay as tight as a drum."

"I think," said Tilka, "I can that make so hot a fire in there, that you must go out in the field for cool."

"Then," said John, "you shall make a hickory fire on Thanksgiving Day. We'll get Pop Swarthout over to mull some cider," and they all looked at mother, who, with the irrelevancy of age, said deliberately:—

"John, what do you suppose became of our cat?"

"Oh," said John, with lordly indifference, seeing that they were all waiting for his answer, "oh, the cat? Why—the cat, she must have gone back to Mr. Braddock's when the birds gave out here. I'll tell him to send her back."

Thanksgiving came and with it the first experience of social life in the new conditions, and a fresh knowledge of the difficulties that beset it. John had worked unremittingly in his front garden, he and Mart toiling late into the moonlight nights to get their lawns seeded and rolled, and he began to feel that his outdoor work was finished for the year. Lucy had arranged in her mind a little celebration. It was to be glowing with her new internal domestic comfort against the wintry exterior. The fire would be lit. The brasses and tiles would shine and glisten. Her friends would make a circle. She would have music and jollity and congratulations. John de-

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

served it, and it should be a good deal of a surprise, for she would bloom out suddenly as the Lady of the Manor and astonish him with her good cheer.

John meanwhile had confided to Mr. Braddock his dilemma with regard to the cat, and Mr. Braddock had kindly consented to pull him out by sending up a sister of Medusa's and holding his tongue.

When Thanksgiving arrived it brought with it late in the afternoon the Braddock establishment, consisting of the lawyer himself, May Braddock, and Sprague, and, to the astonishment of Lucy, Holcomb bringing up the rear with a banjo. In the evening they were joined by Pop Swarthout and his wife. Sprague had to be shown every detail of the improvements. Lucy's particularity was tireless, and at each surprise Sprague exclaimed "Lovely!" and then consulted with May Braddock. Finally Lucy said as she surveyed the group: "Now, Tilka, light the fire. Where is John?"

Nobody seemed to know where he was at that moment, and Holcomb, always alert, exclaimed, "I'll find him." He discovered the host in the kitchen looking at a thermometer.

"Holcomb," he said somewhat solemnly, "have they lit that fire?"

"Your girl is lighting it now," replied Holcomb. "She says she will make it so hot as you never saw."

"I suppose she will. She's a determined girl,

WINTER'S WARNINGS

Holcomb, and the thermometer is sixty-five outdoors. You see we made our arrangements for a cold night. I'm afraid there's such a thing as overdoing it, when one sets out to make it warm for his friends. Lucy has set her mind on hot mulled cider. Think of that, my boy. And old Pop Swarthout will have to stand over that hickory blaze."

"Well, come on in. I can sing my new song before the flames overtake us. It's a Jim-dandy, and I'll defy anybody that isn't a Dutchman to tell what it's about. That's the beauty of it."

Lucy and John many times after recalled that Thanksgiving evening, and recounted it to themselves with tears of mirth. But at the time it was anything but laughable. Tilka succeeded in getting the temperature up nearly to a hundred, and as Pop Swarthout had taken his coat off, Holcomb asked permission to follow suit before he sat down to the piano. Sprague suggested with a blush as he mopped his face, that it might be a good idea to open one of the windows, and John said to himself, "Great heavens, they are double and screwed in."

Lucy was undaunted. She saw her hickory logs blazing, and a reflected light of triumph danced in her eyes. "It's so colonial, isn't it?" she said to Mr. Braddock.

"Yes," said Mr. Braddock, putting his hand over his mouth, "it reminds me of the times that tried men's souls."

"If you stand back here, Pa," said May Brad-

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

dock, "near the open door, you will not suffer so much."

"Shall I begin?" asked Holcomb.

"Wait a moment," said Lucy. "Ma has gone to get a fan."

"This song," said Holcomb in an explanatory way, as he mopped his face, "was specially prepared for this occasion, and I call it 'The Red, Red Clover.' It is supposed to be addressed by a girl, who is in love, to a little bird. I need not tell you who the little girl is."

And then Holcomb began to sing:—

"O, sweet little bird
I have often heard
That to lovers you've something to tell;
But you never could guess
What my tongue would express
As you flit over valley and dell.

"My secret is this —
And I throw you a kiss,
My beautiful little blue gnome.
Sail round and sail over
The red, red clover,
For Johnny is coming home.

"O, sweet little heart,
As you flutter and start,
I will tell you my secret to-day.
Because you will sing it
Wherever you wing it,
For that is a little bird's way.

"So don't you forget,
You sweet little pet,
As you skim over forest and foam.

WINTER'S WARNINGS

Sail round and sail over
The red, red clover,
For Johnny is coming home.

“O, dear little bird,
Perhaps you have heard
Why the skies are so blue overhead?
And the willow trees sing,
By the bank of the spring,
When the blossoms and berries are red.

“If not, you shall hear
My fluttering dear,
From the air and the woods and the foam.
Sail round and sail over
The red, red clover,
For Johnny is coming home.”

During the singing of this song Mr. Braddock and Pop Swarthout had backed out into the adjoining room, as if gently pushed by the heat, and John found them there in comparative comfort, at the dining table, discussing the road masters and roads, with that indifference to the passing trivialities of music which only such veterans can command. Thus the little party fell apart into its natural elements, and while Lucy and May Braddock, with the assistance of Holcomb and Sprague, struggled between the fireplace and the piano with might and main to preserve the soft blandishments of social life, Pop Swarthout and Mr. Braddock settled easily to hard-pan.

“There’s more fuss,” said the former, “made about the roads in the newspapers and in the towns than there is any need for. People what

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

live in cities want everything paved. I hear they are puttin' square stones in their halls. And as fer their streets, it allers seemed to me that they buried everything they wanted under 'em and was always diggin' it out. I calculate that when a man gives most of his time to the roads, his fields is goin' to suffer."

"Yes," said Mr. Braddock, as he looked at John, "the fields always do. The farmers take all their soil off the fields and pile it on the roads. I don't see why they don't plant their potatoes in the highway where the loam is."

"A hard road," said Mr. Swarthout, "will rack a wagon to pieces a great deal quicker nor a soft one, and I guess if this county was macadamized, our horses would be about as foot-sore as the animals in the city. A little mud is good for a horse's hoofs."

Mr. Braddock looked at John. "When you are in Rome, you must do as Romans do," he said. "They were great road builders."

It was very plain that Mr. Swarthout was beyond the reach of Mr. Braddock's irony. He merely said: "I d'know nothin' 'bout Rome, but I've been drivin' over these roads sixty odd year, and I guess I ain't much the worst for it. The folks who come up here with new ideas never stay long enough to carry 'em out."

"Perhaps they would stay longer if the roads were better," observed John.

"Yes," said Pop, with the true bucolic wit, "mebbe that's a pretty good argyment for not makin' 'em any better."

WINTER'S WARNINGS

Mr. Braddock put the back of his hand to his mouth to suppress his admiration of this sally, and said: "Men from the city lack the true agricultural instinct, and generally start in by trying to make boulevards. Our road system, Mr. Dennison, is like a taste for buttermilk, one of our youthful acquirements. You see we turn out once a year with our teams and work out our road taxes. It's quite primitive and beautiful. If we let the roads alone, the rains would wash all the soft soil off and leave the red hardpan smooth and solid. So we turn in and pull the sod down on them and give them a mulching of good vegetable mud. It saves wagons. I've always noticed that city men, who like to have pretty much everything soft, curiously enough like their drinks and their roads hard. I suppose it's the result of the commercial spirit."

What Pop Swarthout would have said to this is not known, for at that moment Lucy appeared at the door with a red face, fanning herself with a sheet of music.

"Where do you suppose Ma and Mrs. Swarthout are?" she asked, trying to look a little anxious.

Mr. Braddock's hand went up to his mouth.

"They're not upstairs," continued Lucy. "I've looked everywhere. They couldn't have gone up the stairs."

"Did you look up the chimney?" asked Mr. Braddock.

Lucy rushed to the open door and looked out

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

into the starlit night. "Ma," she called, addressing the outdoors generally, "you will catch your death of cold. What are you thinking about?"

Then she listened. "I hear them," she said excitedly. "Heavens, they are in the cellar," and Holcomb, who was looking on from the sitting-room, exclaimed: "Happy thought. Let's all go in the cellar."

Lucy snatched up a lamp, and followed by the nimble Holcomb, went carefully down the narrow stairway, and when halfway down she saw her mother and Mrs. Swarthout standing before the store of preserves and pickles, spectacled, and with their heads close together in what was very much like an attitude of silent adoration.

A sudden sense of the incongruity of her social elements made her sit down helplessly on the bottom step, and give way to a little hysterical gulp as she hid her face in her hands. Holcomb, who was behind her, immediately imitated her, saying: "Now this is fine. Wait till I bring the rest of them down."

But Lucy ignored him entirely, and succeeded in rescuing the two old ladies. When they returned to the floor above, they encountered an unusual scene. Tilka and Mart were issuing from the sitting-room carrying between them, on a spade and a pitchfork, one of the blazing and sputtering logs from the new fireplace. It poured forth volumes of protesting smoke as it passed ignominiously to the back door to be cast forth,

WINTER'S WARNINGS

Tilka exclaiming with reassuring triumph, "I fix him, I fix him."

But the fireplace having at last been suppressed, things fell into a more comfortable shape, and Lucy's excitement went off into a milder path as she spread out a repast for her guests, and resolved to let the chasms between them bridge themselves as best they might over the hospitable board. As she looked in upon them from the kitchen, where she was assisting Tilka and saw them separated in couples, she wished that she had some kind of convivial and allowable beverage to melt them together.

While she stood there Mr. Braddock came softly into the kitchen, closing the door behind him and looking as if he had something like sympathy to impart. "Mrs. Dennison," he said in a soft voice, using the back of his hand to moderate his good intentions, "I was going to suggest to you, as I know the customs of the country better than you do, that the proper thing to do would be to bring in a stone fence."

She looked up at him with all her old doubts of his sanity returning.

"Mr. Braddock," she said, "you go right back in the other room and talk to John. I'll attend to the supper."¹

"Just so," replied Mr. Braddock. "I only

¹ It may be well to say for the benefit of benighted city folks that a "stone fence" in the vernacular of Rockland County and New Jersey, stands for a home-made beverage which owes its local peculiarity to the fact that applejack is poured into cider, making a rustic shandygaff that to the rural imagination recalls the hardness of a prehistoric pile of rocks.

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

wanted to offer a suggestion. It seemed to me that as you began the evening with the 'Red, Red Clover,' you might appropriately close it in with a stone fence. Of course I refer to the preparation of the cider. If you will let me fix it, I think I can add to the merrymaking."

"Oh," said Lucy, "if you will fix the cider I shall be very glad."

"I see you have a bottle of applejack on the shelf, doubtless from Mr. Swarthout's cellar. If you will give me a large bowl and some sugar—"

"You will make a punch. How clever of you."

"Just the ordinary stone fence. A stone fence bears the same relation to rural festivities that the bean bag does to religion."

Lucy looked at him sidewise as she held the bowl out at arm's length. "Yes," she said, as one humours a maniac. "Of course, religion and bean bags—why, certainly."

"Perhaps I do not make myself quite plain," said Mr. Braddock. "The bean bag takes the hard edge off religious acerbity. The elders of our church and the Mothers of Israel meet once a week and throw it, thankfully. It is quite humanizing with jelly cake. Where have you the cider? Ah, yes, in the cellar of course."

The repast offered many surprises to Lucy. The old folks looked at it askance. A Welsh rabbit was not unlike a new order of exterminating bug come into the pasture, and the avidity with which the young persons disposed of it drew

WINTER'S WARNINGS

from Mr. Swarthout the remark that it would make a very good noonin' meal, but at that time of night he wouldn't risk nothin' heavier than a hunk of pie or doughnut.

But he took to the stone fence with quiet satisfaction that brought Mr. Braddock's hand up to its usual suppressive work.

"That's pretty good cider, Pop. I don't think you've got any just like it."

"Well, I don't know," replied Mr. Swarthout. "I kinda think I recognize my south orchard, and as fer the flavorin', I guess that's my ten-year-old stuff."

"He knows his own goods," said John. "Mr. Braddock is not an inventor, he's only a restorer. He brings things back to their original owners. He brought our cat back after she'd been gone a month, eh, mother?"

"Yes," said mother, "but I think he might have restored the white toe on her hind leg to the front leg, where it was before."

Then John looked quite stupid for a moment, and Mr. Braddock worked the back of his hand so hard that he attracted everybody's attention. When he tried to change the subject by asking John if he intended to plant some clem-at-is vines on his bay, the sharp voice of May Braddock broke in on them:—

"Clem-a-tis, Pa."

But in spite of everything, the little party as it grew informal grew more cheerful. The stone fence melted away some of Pop Swarthout's in-

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

durated prejudices, and later in the evening he "allowed" that, although he was not much of a singer, he calculated that he could give them a stave of "Gayly the Troubadour," providin' they cared for real music, and it was with some difficulty that Mrs. Swarthout and Mr. Braddock suppressed him when the party broke up, particularly as Mr. Braddock had to suppress himself. Pop said that he didn't go heavy on "Sailin' over the Clover" that time of year, and red clover was a pretty windy forage anyway.

And so Lucy's endeavour to introduce the amenities of social life passed off, with what to her seemed to have many ludicrous failures. But it had knit some ties of which she was not aware. The sight of her mother's store of preserves had awakened a new respect in Mrs. Swarthout's breast, and the two ladies established a new reciprocity, that declared itself in their standing at their respective stone walls when the weather was fine and shrieking their intimacy across fields to each other.

When the Christmas time approached the weather came on bitter cold for a week, and Lucy settled down before her fire one Sunday morning with a letter in her hand, and looking from it into the blaze and then at the bay window past which the flakes were scurrying, she began to experience some of the delights of a safe retreat, and the added comfort of a real mistress at her own hearthstone. She was dressed in a warm wrapper, and could not sufficiently admire the manner in which her wood-fire was redeeming its reputation. Mart had re-

WINTER'S WARNINGS

ported that the thermometer had been down below zero all night, and the reaches of the river were frozen over.

Presently John came in slapping his hands and looking quite ruddy, for he had been out in the wind.

"Well, sweetheart," he said, "this looks comfortable, and you seem to be enjoying it."

"I've got a letter from Kate," she said. "Let me read it to you."

"Fire away," he said, "but I don't believe it will add to our comfort."

"Yes it will," she said. "Listen : —

"MY DEAR LUCY : I supposed of course that you were in the city for the winter and that I should hear from you sooner or later, but Wes met John and learned that you had not come in. What a poor little lamb you are, aren't you? I suppose John told you we are boarding now in Washington Square; two rooms and no responsibility. We tried light housekeeping in a furnished flat after we gave up the Cramp house, but it was almost as much bother as housekeeping. Cramp turned out to be no better than he should be. I suppose John has told you about him. He let them sue me for the furniture, and I was up on supplementary proceedings just like an actress. It was real fun while it lasted, and I got into all the papers. I don't know how long we shall stay here, for Wes wants to go to a hotel, and I suppose that is the only way to live, anyhow. One

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

can't hang herself up in a wardrobe like last year's frock, or bury herself before she dies in the country. I don't suppose you get about much now — how are you, anyway? Does John treat you any better than he did? If you are coming down to do any shopping for Christmas, let me know. I can put you up to a great trick in woollens. So run in. Kiss Harold for me.

“ ‘Yours,

“ ‘KATE.’ ”

She laid the letter on the little table indifferently and looked in the fire. John was disinclined to make any comment. He perceived that Lucy felt that she was slowly losing an old friend, and that regrets would be useless. So he stretched out his legs and waived away the whole matter by saying:—

“Not a pipe frozen, my dear. I have been examining them, and there's eight inches of ice at the foot of the hill. Mart is going to make an ice-house of those boards that we took off this floor.”

“I was thinking,” said Lucy, “how lively and festive the stores must be in the city now, as Christmas approaches, and everybody is preparing for it. One misses in the country the close contact of humanity at such times.”

“You are thinking of cornucopias and caramels,” said John. “I don't blame you. Perhaps you would like to go to a hotel for a while and hug the steam-pipes.”

“Oh, I am comfortable, John, very. I can do my hugging better here.”

WINTER'S WARNINGS

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure. Aren't you?"

"Well, sometimes I have thought that the game was not worth the candle."

"You're afraid that when the wind blows from the northeast, it will blow the candle out. But it can't blow this fire out, John. The harder the wind blows the more defiantly the fire snaps and roars."

He got up, and going to the bay window, stood with his back to her, looking out. The wind was driving the fine flakes almost horizontally past. The cedars were bending under the pressure. Southward there were bleak stretches of whitening fields. It was very still inside. He could hear the ticking of the clock in the dining room.

"I suppose," he said, "the city cars will all be blocked to-morrow. What's the matter with Harold?"

"He is rejoicing over the snow-storm," said Lucy. "You don't appear to see how jolly it is."

"I was thinking," John said, "that there will be three more months of it."

"And then?" asked Lucy.

"Then — oh, then, the spring I suppose. But it's a long stretch."

Lucy got up, and coming to the window, let her head drop on his shoulder.

"But John," she said, "it's the home stretch."

He put his arm about her. "Do you really think so?"

"I am sure of it. You are trying to be blue,

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

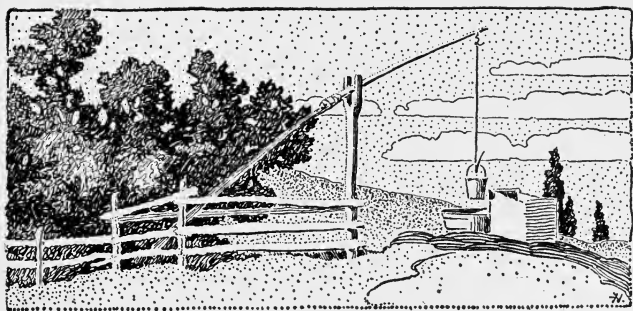
and everything is as pure and white as a flag of truce. I don't think you ought to look at the snow if it affects you that way. Listen."

She went to the piano, and softly touching it, began to hum the refrain of Holcomb's song:—

"Sail round and sail over
The red, red clover,
For Johnny is coming home."

He threw himself in a chair. "It's all right, my dear, but we have deprived ourselves of all chance of doing any light housekeeping or taking furnished rooms or going to a hotel."





CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

SOME months have elapsed. The making of a country home has been beset with discouragements and difficulties. The winter came with its storms, and shut all the improvements indoors. Mr. Ridabok's hammer has not ceased in all that time. Inch by inch the interior of the home has assumed airs of comfort and security.

One morning in late April Lucy Dennison sat before her new fireplace. Harold stood beside her. She had a roll of something in her arms. The wood fire smouldered, but the sunlight came at intervals through the bay window as the spring winds shifted the clouds, occasionally giving a long-drawn sigh.

"I know the spring has come," said Harold, "because the skunk cabbages are all green, and the robins are back, and the maple sugar is come

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

at the store, and Mart said he was going to plough because the frost is all out of the ground."

His mother got up softly and deposited her bundle on a couch in the corner, pulling the screen around to protect it from possible draught. She stood there looking at it with meditative triumph when John came in softly, and putting his arm about her, joined in the contemplation.

"She is going to look like you," he said. "That is some comfort. She seems to have arrived with the spring. We ought to call her Violet."

"The violets haven't come yet," said Harold; "only the skunk cabbages."

"Well, it has been a long and dreary winter to you, my dear," said John.

"But nobody thinks of the winter when spring arrives," replied Lucy.

"I hope we shall not get any late frosts. I suppose you have heard of winter lingering in the lap of spring."

Lucy got up, and taking the sleeping bundle off the couch, put it in her husband's arms. "Let us try and think of spring lingering in the lap of winter," she said,—"and speak softly."

Then she poked the logs, and sitting down again, said: "What a lucky thing it was for us that I did come back with you when you got that telegram from Kate saying I was sick. Now that I think of it all, it looks as if it was providential that I went to the city with Wes and his wife, and tried to be as gay as I could."

CONCLUSION

John was walking up and down with his bundle. "I thought at the time," he said, "that it would have been more providential to have stayed home and helped me out."

"I didn't know enough, John. You have always given me credit for knowing a great deal more than I really do. I had to learn a very important lesson."

John put the baby back on the couch, and said carelessly: "Well, if you learned it, it's all right. Don't let's talk about it. We have both learned a good many lessons, and I think we've won our fight. At all events we have got a home over our heads, and you are not only the mother of a family, but the mistress of the best house on this road, if Ridabok and I do say it."

"But, John, I never could have appreciated it if I had not learned what it was to be without a home, and Kate Ellis never ceased to instil that lesson into me. I discovered that there are some women who are incapable of understanding what a home means. We all get the credit of being born domestic. But the best of us, I guess, have to learn it like our other lessons. I must have been a dreadfully giddy thing when you first married me."

"Oh, but think of me. What a dull, mechanical, methodical chump I must have been to a lively girl."

"So you were, but it is that has saved us."

"I think you are giving me too much credit. The rest of the family is entitled to some of it —

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

that bundle, for example," and he pointed to the couch. "I knew you would come out all right if you stayed with Kate long enough. Almost anybody would unless he married her."

"Poor Kate," said Lucy. "She is living in furnished apartments now."

"And her husband is travelling all the time," added John. "He has got to be a second-class drummer."

"He isn't travelling now. He is home and sick."

"Oh, you have heard from them?"

"Indirectly. Sprague got a letter from Holcomb. I shouldn't wonder if they were hard up."

"No," said John, carelessly, as he went to the window and looked out, "I don't think anybody would wonder at that who knew them."

"John, I have a great mind to ask them up on a visit. I thought that as Kate taught me a lesson, I might teach her one."

"Don't," said John. "She doesn't like children, and it would only interfere with the work."

"But the work is all done. The bathroom is finished, isn't it?"

"Yes — finished this morning."

"And the wainscoting in the new dining room is dry?"

"Dry as a bone," said John.

"Well, then, we ought to have dinner in it, and show it off. You are the strangest man I ever saw. You go on working day after day, and finishing up everything in fine style, and never

CONCLUSION

want to show it off. I have never entertained Kate properly in my life. I should just like to know what she would say to that cherub."

"I know what she will say. She will chuck it under the chin and say it looks like me, which is a lie, and then she will ask you if you have any ice."

"And I will have it — from our own ice-house, and I will heap it on her head as if it were coals of fire. Just think how Tilka will look in a white cap and apron — waiting. I'm just dying to say, 'Tilka, you may bring from the cellar a bottle of that old Burgundy; I think Mrs. Ellis prefers Burgundy.' We *can* have a bottle of old Burgundy in the cellar, John, can't we?"

"Of course we can, if your mother has left any room in the cellar."

"Then, John, what can be more withering if the weather is fine than to say, 'My dear, we are in the habit of driving in the afternoons. Do you care to have the team up?' I just want to avail myself of my privileges and ask Kate how the gas collector is and the janitor, and if the man on the floor below plays the cornet yet, and find out if the restaurant bills are as big as ever."

"My dear, you wish to exercise your fiendish propensity to triumph over the unfortunate."

"But she said that I would get sick of it before the winter was over, and that you were making a dairy maid of me. It's only justice to you to have her up. I really want her to meet Mrs. Swarthout."

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

“Perhaps Mrs. Swarthout would like to take her to board — then you could run over and see her without having your pillow-slips all burned by cigarettes.”

Notwithstanding this conversation Lucy did not invite her old friend. The truth is that both John and his wife were so occupied with their growing possessions that they forgot all about their former acquaintances who were now moving in a world as far as possible from the practical round of country experiences. But it so happened that without any intention on the part of the Dennisons, the old friends came together once more for the last time, and the meeting resulted in a way that none of them could have anticipated, and only served to show that it is character that makes environment, and not as so many of us suppose, environment that makes character.

Late in the summer Sprague and May Braddock were married, and John had been the best man, Holcomb being somewhere in the West with a comic opera company. It was a very quiet affair in the village church, Mr. Braddock giving away the bride with the back of his hand to his mouth to suppress his sense of humour, and then the couple went off somewhere for a fortnight. While they were gone John obtained an option from Pop Swarthout on five adjoining acres for a thousand dollars, and when Sprague came back full of a building scheme and desiring to put up a house next to his friend, John sold him the piece of land for fifteen hundred dollars. Afterwards, when

CONCLUSION

John paid off his mortgage with the profit, Pop Swarthout put his hand on his shoulder and said : —

“ Young man, I don’t often miss my calkerlations, but when I do I don’t hesitate to own up. You fooled me. I figgered you was like the rest of ’em and was goin’ off half cocked. I guess I was a dumgormed old turtle, but you ken hev any ten acres I’ve got for the same figger. I say that to show my respect for your business talents.”

It was Sprague, however, who alone brought to the estimation of John’s work an artist’s keen relish. He invariably looked upon the improvement as if it were the painting of a picture, and was never tired of telling his wife what an extraordinary fellow John was in his plodding way. “ Look at that front garden of his,” he would say. “ It is really the prettiest plot on the road. Strangers ask whose French villa that is in the Italian garden, and there isn’t a French or Italian thing about it. Everything in his garden he and his wife picked up in the woods. Instead of buying exotics, he just took the wild azaleas, the bitter-sweet, the clematis, and the sweet brier, and stuck those cedars and white birches in by instinct. He makes me ashamed of my profession when I look at his lawns, and I always want to go in and roll under his trees. And the beauty of it all is that the thing keeps slowly growing without any anxiety or clatter or parade. Now he is going to build an addition out of the rest of his stone fence — library and billiard room, I believe.”

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

John was in the habit of speaking lightly of his achievements. "There was considerably more luck than genius about it," he said to Sprague. "I stumbled on the right kind of a woman to begin with."

"Stumbled is lovely," said Sprague. "Did it ever occur to you that she stumbled, too?"

"Then, I stumbled on good servants," continued John. "In nine cases out of ten it's the servants that play the deuce with country living. Having got my hand in as it were, I then stumbled over an exceptionally docile carpenter, who could wait a week or two for his wages if I was pinched, and finally I stumbled on two or three stanch friends up here that played the band for me while I worked."

Sprague said this would not do. "I've been studying this thing," he said, "and I've seen several city folks come up here with good servants and good workmen and good friends, and they generally made a botch of it in a year or two. Heaps of money sunk in landscape gardening, hot-houses, city servants, equipages, fancy fowls and dog kennels, roadsters, and a general attempt to bring the city into the country. At the end of a year they complained of miasm, mosquitoes, and bad soil, and dearth of society. Then they sold out at a sacrifice, and hurried back where there was Opera or electric cars. It's the old story, Dennison, there's no art or satisfaction in Nature,—you have to bring those things with you, and most of the people who try the rustic

CONCLUSION

business ought to stay in the suburbs, where they can keep one hand on the telephone and the other on an intelligence office."

"The fact is, Sprague, I didn't have money enough to make any mistakes with. That was another piece of luck. And—I was stubborn enough to believe in myself. You are about the only man who could see what I intended to do before I did it, and I haven't done anything that any plodder cannot do. The real reason why more men do not do it is not because they are not able, but because they are not willing. They don't like the life. Now, it occurs to me that you and I ought to make our own society. We shall get two or three more of our own kind around us in time, and that will be all the society we want."

"You knew how to go to work."

"Well, you would think that any man of good sense would know how—but he doesn't. I can sell my house for five thousand dollars. It's insured for that. I'll tell you why. It's the only house on this road of moderate price that has a complete water system. Visitors are amazed to find hot and cold water faucets in my bathroom and a proper system of drainage. But it's the simplest thing in the world when you have a reservoir. Enterprise is far more bewildering to these people than capital. They are all small capitalists, and they seem to think they never would be if they displayed any enterprise. Look at that highway. It ought to be macadamized. It would

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

improve the property immensely. Do you know what it would cost the township to grade it up and gravel it for two miles?"

"More than the township will pay."

"I think I would take the contract for five thousand dollars. I can buy a stone crusher for fifteen hundred, and I'd put three men at it for a year."

"We'll have to make you supervisor of the county," said Sprague.

But John was not ambitious, and he said he didn't aim at anything higher than roadmaster.

Perhaps Lucy would not have known how far she had drifted from her former city habits and tastes if it had not been for her unexpected meeting with Kate Ellis. In obedience to the doctor's advice to take Wes away from the city and his acquaintances for a month or two, and after finding that her resources were insufficient to pay the bills, Kate consulted with Holcomb, and that chipper young gentleman immediately said: "What's the matter with your old friends — the Dennisons? Is there anybody farther from the madding crowd than they are? Is there anybody that needs the freshening and joyousness of your presence as they do?"

"Yes," said Kate, "it's all very well for me, but consider Wes."

"You write and ask her if she knows of a good quiet desolate farmhouse, and — a box of gloves she'll invite you up. If you say so, I'll go up myself and fix it. Sprague must be aching for me

CONCLUSION

by this time. Do you remember how Dennison's wife used to sing my songs?"

"She has two children now," said Kate.

This sounded as if it were final with respect to Lucy's music. But the upshot of it was that Holcomb went off to the country to reconnoitre, and having reported that everything was all right, Kate herself went up to make a call on Lucy Dennison.

The instant the women came together, it was plain to both of them that conventional endearments could not quite bridge the gap that had grown between them. But this fact only made them dispense the endearments more recklessly. Kate kissed her old friend and called her dear, but she was conscious of a little effort in it. Lucy thought for the first time that Kate was too pronouncedly dressed. The flaring hat seemed slightly boisterous, and she thought Kate might have wiped some of the powder off her face.

On the other hand, Kate noticed a sober, matronly air in her former associate that she thought was meant to be slightly superior.

"I am so glad I found you," she said. "Wes and I are looking for a quiet rural home where we can rest for a few days. He is mentally run down, and the doctor says he must not think for a month."

"How nice," replied Lucy. "I shouldn't wonder if Farmer Van Kleeck's over on the Nyack pike would just suit you. He is three miles from the nearest house, and that's a tan-

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

nery. If I were you, I'd write and inquire about it."

This friendly interest stirred something in Kate very like viciousness, but she did not betray it.

"How nicely you are fixed," she said. "Is this the same house that I came to see you in before? What have you done to it?"

"Finished it," replied Lucy. "If you'll stay to lunch, I'll tell Tilka to get you up something. It's too bad, but Mrs. Sprague and I are going to the County Fair at one o'clock, and I can't get out of it. You know we are exhibiting there."

"I'll just write that name of the farmer down," said Kate. "What did you say it was — Van Kleek — on the what?"

"On the Nyack pike."

"What's the pike? — a river, I suppose — I like rivers, and pike makes an excellent dish served with mayonnaise."

"Dear me, no. It's the road — the turnpike. Then you will not stay?"

"To lunch? Oh, no, I can't. I just wanted to take a look at you. How you have changed!"

"Yes, it's dreadful. I'm getting so stout. But you keep your figure beautifully. Shall I show you the house? — you'll be delighted with our salon dining room. It will seat twenty people at table."

"You don't know of anybody nearer than the pike, do you, who would accommodate us?"

"I can make inquiries for you. What is your city address?"

CONCLUSION

Kate got up, walked to the window, and bit her lip. What was it had given this salesman's wife such a complacent air of independence? Kate was piqued, and was coming perilously near to retaliation. So she smiled, and looked unusually amiable as she said:—

"I suppose you have your hands full. What with churning and weeding and nursing, you don't get much time for social duties."

Lucy smiled with an equal amiability. "That's just it, dear," she said. "If it wasn't for people coming in all the time unexpectedly, I'd get a great deal more done. Let me show you the baby before you go."

As Kate took the prize Dennison bundle in her arms, and patted its cheek with her gloved hands, she said: "What a little beauty! Where are the other children? Oh, they are working, I suppose—and you, you little busy bee,"—tapping the bundle with her finger,—“I suppose you are going to learn how to make butter and apple sauce and rag carpet.”

"There's only one other," said Lucy—"Harold. I think we'll send this one to Bryn Mawr."

"And Harold—he will go to West Point, I suppose."

"Harold is to be a civil engineer—he is to be educated for it, his father says."

"How sweet. I wish there was a school where our sex could be educated to be civil somethings, don't you?"

"Yes, dear, but it's so much harder to educate

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

our sex. They never take things seriously until they have a family."

"And that doesn't always make our sex as considerate as it ought to be."

"It will be too bad if you do not find the quiet place you are in search of," said Lucy.

"My dear," Kate retorted, "you know very well that I detest quiet. It is on Wesley's account that I am anxious. I think a month up here would kill me. It's all very beautiful, but I must have my bath, you know, and telephone, and I never could eat country fare. Besides, dear, I've always held that country life narrows the taste, and is apt to make one illiberal — don't you find it so?"

"Yes, I suppose it does," Lucy replied, "but it doesn't narrow one's person — that's the worst of it. If one is to keep her figure, I suppose it is absolutely necessary to have worries and uncertainties and disappointments. Sometimes I feel that I shall get horribly fat just because there aren't any."

"But, my dear, if you do get preposterously fleshy, you can exhibit yourself at the County Fair. They offer prizes, don't they, for such things? — but perhaps it's only pigs, not persons. I don't know much about it. I used to read about it when I was a girl. Good people in the country always died in a pot of grease — or perhaps it was butter."

"Yes, indeed. We thought those were fairy tales, but the people up here are doing it yet. It's all true."

CONCLUSION

"Have you seen Holcomb lately?" asked Kate.

"No. He was up here and called, but I did not see him. I was just going out to drive with the children and Mrs. Swarthout, and he would have been very apt to sing one of his songs before the children."

"Heavens," said Kate, "what a narrow escape for the darlings!"

When Kate returned to the city, she left her amiability in instalments at every station she passed, and when she reached Wes, she was in an undisguised state of indignation.

"They have grown to be a set of rustic prigs," she said. "Don't talk to me any more about the Dennisons. Lucy has got to be as unbearable as her husband, but I can tell you one thing, she has got a home over her head—which I haven't, and I suppose she is entitled to be stuck up. I guess we will have to go our own gait—it isn't theirs."

"Well, my dear, it has been a pretty frisky gait—what we've had of it."

"And what have we got to show for it?"

"Oh, say, you've been struck by the land scheme."

"No, I haven't. I've been struck by a woman who has her own home, and is too independent to be bearable."

"And if you had a home, you'd pawn it the first rainy day. But if you think we ought to go in for reality—what's the matter with buying a

MAKING OF A COUNTRY HOME

nice sunny plot at Greenwood Cemetery? I don't believe they will let us keep a cow there, but we might compromise on a goat, and, anyway, you can plant flowers and things, and always feel that you've got something snug."

After this the Dennisons and the Ellises never again met. John did hear that Wesley said of him that he was a wasted hayseed. That rather pleased John, and occasionally when he went to the Astor House Rotunda, he put a wisp of timothy in his mouth, and rather ostentatiously dumgormed the oyster pâté if it didn't suit him.

But Sprague and a few other persons got to calling him Supervisor, and whether that is an official title or only another of the rural pleasant-ries, I am blessed if I know.







